



MANOR BOOKS 12357 ★ \$1.25

*A chilling novel of Gothic suspense.*

# Storm House

Florence  
Hurd

# A Missive of Death

*called young Laura back to Storm House after eight years in Paris. Her proud, beautiful mother had committed suicide by leaping off Cliff's Edge.*

*Laura had been sent away to school when her mother had discovered her love for Armand, her stepfather's poor nephew. Now Armand too had returned to Storm House, but he had changed into a brooding, secretive person.*

*Far worse, her home became a deadly trap—boulders hurtled out of nowhere, the vicious mastiffs got loose and attacked her, and a ghostly vision of evil appeared in her room.*

*And suddenly Laura knew someone in the strange and decaying mansion wanted her dead—and would stop at nothing until her lifeless body was flung from the treacherous cliffs.*



OTHER MANOR BOOKS  
BY  
FLORENCE HURD

THE GORGON'S HEAD  
SEANCE FOR THE DEAD  
WITCHES' POND  
THE HOUSE ON TREVOR STREET  
MOORSEND MANOR

# Storm House

Florence  
Hurd



MANOR  
BOOKS  
INC.



SF  
HURD

# VISION OF DEATH

The sporadic shrieks of the wind awakened me. The room had become icy cold and drafty. I sat up and saw that the door had blown open. As I stared a faint glow appeared in the doorway. Then the glow grew slowly brighter.

It was a shimmering figure. A white cap, a hood. Mignon! "She comes with the storm," Cosette had said. And then she had added the ominous warning: "When she throws back her hood . . . you will see a death's head."

The glow became more intense, outlining the white phantom sharply against the darkness. The arms reached up for the hood.

A cold nausea seized me. I shut my eyes then and screamed and screamed and screamed. . . .

JOINT FICTION RESERVE

313064

A MANOR BOOK . . . . . 1975

Manor Books Inc.  
432 Park Avenue South  
New York, New York 10016

Copyright, ©, 1973, by Manor Books Inc.  
All rights reserved.  
Printed in the U.S.A.





## CHAPTER I

The cablegram was shockingly brief. TRIED TO CALL—RACHEL DIED THIS EVENING—LETTER WILL FOLLOW—PHILLIPE.

I had just returned to my Paris apartment from a two week bicycle trip in the south of France and I was totally unprepared for this shattering message. I remember standing in the middle of the room, holding the yellow slip of paper in my hand, dazed with shock and guilt. While I had been blissfully pedalling over the country roads of Gascony my mother had died. How had it happened?

I had seen her seven months earlier when she, together with Phillipe, my stepfather, had come over to Paris on a visit and she had never appeared more vibrantly happy and healthy. Her last letter had made no mention of illness. There had been only a lengthy account of Phillipe's latest show of paintings in a Boston gallery. Had she concealed some dread disease from me, cancer perhaps? Or had she been the victim of an accident?

The letter, I thought, Phillipe's letter will explain. But though I sorted through the mail twice and checked with the concierge there was none. Either it was still in transit or Phillipe had been too overwhelmed to write. Poor Phillipe. Even in the midst of my own bewildered grief I felt for him. For though I loved my mother, distance and time, I knew, would make her loss more bearable. I had been away from



home the past eight years, going to school in Switzerland and now in Paris. I had a career, perhaps marriage to look forward to. But Phillipe had centered his whole life around Mother. I think she meant more to him than his paintings.

It had always been that way. I remembered as a child how I would sometimes watch Phillipe brush my mother's long hair, an evening ritual. She would be seated at her dressing table, he sweeping the brush through, slowly counting out the prescribed one hundred strokes, never taking his eyes from her in the mirror. Although my mother was not a pretty woman—her jaw was too strong, her brows too heavy—Phillipe's look would be so full of admiration and love, she would appear beautiful in my eyes, too. And in those moments I would envy them this mutual love which seemed to shut out everyone, including me.

It was hard to imagine Phillipe without Rachel. He would be like a ship without a rudder. I was fond of my stepfather with his quick, unabashed emotional responses, his ready smile, his disapproving frown. I always knew where I stood with Phillipe. He had been the only father I ever really had since my own had died when I was an infant. And he had been kind to me, even indulgent at times, risking Rachel's disapproval. For Rachel had believed that children should be brought up strictly, without fuss, though her version of "strictness," fortunately, was limited to the golden rule and good manners at the dinner table. She had been the product of an old New England family, and not even her first husband's wealth and social position had diminished the importance of the simple precepts she had acquired as a girl—one must never lie, never steal, never cheat or take up with bad company. This last was a bit of snobbery, although she would never admit it.

Despite her rigid notions of right and wrong, Mother allowed me a great deal of freedom. Perhaps it was because she felt that there was little harm I could come to, living as we did on a small, lonely island off the coast of Maine. My protracted ramblings over the grassy downs and rocky beach-



es did not seem to trouble her as long as I behaved properly at home and made myself presentable to her guests. And we had guests—frequently. Both Phillipe and Mother were great entertainers, showering a lavish hospitality upon a host of friends. During the summer months the two launches were constantly in use transporting boatloads of smartly dressed men and women—many of them well known in the society and art world—from the mainland. Mother was a proud and unstinting hostess. Besides a large staff of well-trained servants, presided over by the ubiquitous housekeeper, Cosette, she imported a cook from Paris. His exotic delicacies accompanied by the rarest of wines from our own cellars were the talk of her guests, even those whose appetites had been jaded by a surfeit of gourmet dining.

One of my favorite memories was of my mother, tall and regal in a long Paris gown, a smile hovering on her lips as she descended the stairs to greet her guests. There was one dress I particularly loved, a black filmy thing with trailing chiffon sleeves and a flounce at the bottom. So avid had been my admiration she promised me that some day, when I was old enough to wear black, it would be mine.

All these things I recalled as I stood there in that hot, cramped apartment of mine high above the streets of Paris: my mother's mirrored image, my mother scolding because I had not combed my hair and guests would be arriving, my mother walking slowly down the staircase in that long black dress. And now she was gone. I reread the cablegram as if I could wring some further clue from those cryptic words. Nothing. Nothing except that Rachel had died.

Suddenly, impulsively, I decided not to wait for Phillipe's letter. I would not even put through a call—a thought which had run through my mind the moment I had read Phillipe's message. I would go home. I would go home to Storm House. I wanted to be there, to talk to Phillipe, to find out with my own ears what had happened, why Rachel had died. And as I began to hurriedly pack my bags I was gripped with



a sudden feverish longing to see Storm House again, a feeling I had not had since those first terrible weeks at fifteen when I had been sent away to school.

Storm House had been with me then day and night, in my thoughts, and in my dreams. But as I gradually became involved with school, with new friends, first in Switzerland and later in Paris, Storm House faded in my memory. Every now and then I made plans to return for a visit at Christmas, or perhaps in the summer months, but somehow those plans never materialized. I saw Mother once, sometimes twice a year. She and Phillipe went abroad often and I would join them or they me for a week or ten days at a time. Our visits were good and happy ones. So there had been no compelling reason for me to return, no one to return to, except Armand, and he had long since been gone from the Island.

Flying across the Atlantic, the unseen miles skimming below me, I thought more and more about Storm House. It was an ugly house, really, rather grim with its rough stone and native rock facade, its squat turrets and narrow windows, its higgledy-piggledy tacked on additions. But I had loved it as a child growing up, loved its many unused rooms, the odd little niches and stone stairways, the mock embattlements and dungeons, so ideal for games of make-believe.

Its sketchy history lent itself readily to invention. The house was built in the 1700s by Pierre Tourand (from whom Phillipe claimed direct descent), the incorrigible black sheep son of a French noble family exiled to the New World. Why Pierre had chosen that wild, isolated island, no one knew, but, as the story went, he set about doing his best to duplicate the home he had left behind in France. Without an architect or adequate building materials, Tourand's Folly, as it was called in those days, bore little resemblance to the original Tourand chateau, a place I did not see until many years later.

But as children, Armand and I were hardly aware of this. How many rainy days we spent wandering through its innumerable corridors and rooms, crossing paper swords on



its parapets, storming the turrets as we acted out our charades of great lords and ladies. We had a legend, also, to weave into our fantasies, for like many old places shrouded in time, Storm House had its very own ghost. Her name was Mignon, a beautiful young woman supposed to have been murdered by her husband in a jealous rage. Cosette had sworn that she had seen her gliding down the central staircase more than once on stormy nights. She was always dressed in a white hooded cape and beneath that hood, Cosette had told us, was a skeleton's face, the hideous visage of what was left of Mignon after she had been tortured by her husband to reveal her lover's name. I can remember how we would creep out of our beds when the thunder clapped overhead and the sea raged around us, sitting on the landing peering through the rails with deliciously frightened eyes, hoping to catch a glimpse of the unhappy Mignon. We never did.

We, Armand and I. In all the hundreds of memories I had of Storm House there were very few which did not include Armand. Armand, dark and wild, running like a hare. Armand smiling. Armand sulking. He was so much a part of Storm House, so much like its rough wind-lashed stones, it was hard sometimes to realize that he had not always been there. But I was five when he first came to Tourand Island, a morose silent boy of eight, tall even then for his age. He had just lost his parents, Phillipe's brother and sister-in-law, in a car accident, and if he grieved, he showed it only in surly looks, as if by pushing us gruffly away he could deny that we existed, that he had been abandoned to live with strangers.

But he was only eight, after all, and as the weeks passed his self-imposed isolation began to crack. Still not trusting any of us at Storm House he tried to make friends with the other children on the Island. They were the sons and daughters of the half dozen fishermen's families who lived in a cluster of small wooden cottages at Fisherman's Cove on the south side of the Island. A close knit group, they refused to take the boy from the Big House into their circle (all this

Armand told me much later). So there was nothing for him to do but grudgingly accept me, still a "baby" in his eyes. I, of course, was delighted, even though his acceptance was scornful, for I was lonely and badly needed a playmate, too. Gradually, however, with the passage of time as we roamed the beaches and windswept rocky cliffs together, digging for clams, searching out bird's nests, we became fast friends and the difference in our ages no longer mattered.

Though Armand eventually came to an armed truce with my mother and Cosette, he and Phillipe remained alienated. I don't know whose fault it was, whether it was Armand's sullen rebelliousness which triggered Phillipe's anger or whether it was the other way around. But in those days I was inclined to believe it was Phillipe's and I found myself more than once hotly defending Armand to him. It puzzled and hurt me, too, to think that Phillipe, who got along and liked everybody, should not feel the same about his nephew.

For the most part, however, Armand and I had little to do with Rachel and Phillipe, engrossed as they were with each other and their friends. We lived in a tight little world of our own. The seasons passed, each with its own charm—the hazy autumns, the gale driven winters, the new, reluctant springs, the golden summers—and time turning slowly seemed to last forever.

I don't remember exactly at what point we began to realize that we were no longer children, when our feelings began to change, to mature like our bodies. But I do recall the first time we became lovers in the flickering light of a beach bonfire. To us it was the natural course of events, as instinctive as the mating of birds, the flow of the tide. Our lovemaking was without shame or guilt. It was Mother who gave us that. I don't think until the moment she came upon us kissing on the terrace she had realized that I was growing up into womanhood and that Armand was already a man. Her shock, her dismay, her self-recrimination were poured upon our heads like molten lead. I remember Armand listen-



ing in silence, and then, when she had finished her tirade, he had said, "Laura and I are going to be married."

This served only to set Mother off again. Her daughter marry an uneducated, poor relation? That to her was as horrifying as our immoral behavior. Immediate plans were made to send me away to a girl's school in Switzerland. Armand was to go to a small college in upstate New York. I cried, I stormed, I raged. But Mother was adamant. The night before I left I managed to sneak out and meet Armand. We swore eternal, undying love. Our separation would only be temporary. I would be eighteen in three years, Armand twenty-one. Then we could do as we liked. "We'll show them," said Armand, his voice bitter, his eyes blazing with defiance.

We wrote each other faithfully, regularly each day, long letters filled with passionate prose. I hated it there, I said. I wanted to go home, to be with Armand more than anything in the world. I did not know how I could live past the winter without him. And yet, despite myself, I was drawn into the life around me, the school, new friendships with girls my own age, and slowly I began to see how exciting, how much fun, how fascinating, the world could be outside the Island. At first I skipped writing a day or two at a time, then a week, then a whole month went by without my answering Armand's letters. He reproached me in vitriolic language and as I read his angry words I would feel guilty and would promise myself to write him a twenty page letter the moment I had free time.

That free time never seemed to come. Armand wrote me one last letter in which he accused me of being a hypocrite, a rich, spoiled darling like my mother, a fickle brat. Some time later I learned Armand had disappeared from school and that was the last any of us saw or heard from him again.

I took the train up from Boston and when I reached Doryville, the village across the bay from Tourand Island, I

put in a call to Phillipe. Cosette answered the phone. She had a difficult time, what with the poor, crackling connection, and when she finally realized who I was there was a short, shocked silence. "We didn't expect you," she said.

"I know I'm late. . . ." I explained how I had been gone when Phillipe's cablegram had come. "I only wish I could have been here, at least for the funeral."

"It doesn't matter now," she said.

"What happened?" I asked. "How did Mother die?"

"I . . . I'd rather not talk about it," she said. "You'll have to ask Phillipe."

"All right. Could you have Roberts bring the launch over for me?"

"Roberts is gone. And Phillipe is using the launch."

"What about the other one? Can't you send someone over with the other one?"

"There's only the one now. And there's nobody to send. You'll have to hire a boat from the village." The receiver went down with a loud click.

It was then I should have guessed that something was wrong. Cosette's tartness, if nothing else, should have given me a hint of what was to come. Although far from a sentimental person, she was not without feeling, and I knew that in her own sour way she was quite fond of me. Her greeting, after so many years, was not what I had expected. Perhaps she was angry at me, I thought, for not having tried to come home sooner, for not being present at my mother's funeral.

My mother's death had probably been a terrible shock to her, too. She had been housekeeper at Storm House even before Mother and I came there. Phillipe's father had brought her over from France as young girl. She was a Legrun, a member of a peasant family as old as the Tourand's, and traditionally they had always served in a Tourand household. Cosette was a strong-willed woman, just as my mother was, and they clashed immediately. Mother confided in me years later that she would have sent Cosette away during those first six months, but she was a lit-



be afraid of her and felt that to dismiss Cosette would have been a show of cowardice. It was not until she and Cosette had become friends that Cosette admitted she had been afraid of Mother, too, "the blue blooded lady with all that money." Though they hardly ever seemed to agree on anything, their quarreling was a family joke, a pair of stubborn women, each holding a high regard for the other, who quibbled more out of habit than animosity.

It was a little while before I could find someone who would run me over to the Island. That was the second thing that should have told me something was wrong. Since it was late September, the summer people had long since gone. The fishermen had come in with their day's catch and there were plenty of boats available. Yet everyone seemed too busy to make the half-hour run. Finally Clem Barker, owner of a leaky motor skiff, grumbling and muttering to himself, agreed to take me.

As we plowed through the oily sea, the sun dipped behind a cloud bank and the day that had been warm with Indian summer, suddenly turned chill. I drew my light jacket close, my heart quickening with excitement. The last leg of my journey—I was almost there! The other islands in the bay, already shrouded in the evening mist, passed like phantom wooded knolls in a mirage. I clutched the rail, breathing the salt sea air, my eyes straining to the gray rolling horizon, eager for my first glimpse of Tourand Island. It was the last one before Cobb lighthouse and the open sea. Today it seemed to take forever to reach it. At last my impatient eyes made out a line in the distance, hardly more than a pencil mark against the cloud bank. As it grew I could see the tops of the tall firs and spruce, the windswept Island's only stand of trees.

And then, in a stray shaft of dying sunlight—there it was.

Storm House rising out of the sea, a grim stone fortress, alone, solitary in the gathering gloom. There were the familiar turrets, the crenelated battlements, Phillipe's pennant flying half mast from the roof. Familiar, yet not the

same. It seemed to me that I was seeing it for the first time, that this was not the Storm House of my memory, not my well-remembered home, but something different, something unknown. It had changed. I could not say how, could not put a name to that sudden feeling of disappointment, of depression which came over me. As the Island grew closer I tried to reason with myself, thinking that perhaps it was I who had changed. What was that famous expression? "You can't go home again." I wasn't fifteen, I was twenty-three. Time had altered my perspective. That was all.

The Island's dock came into view looking strangely empty. I could not recall a time when there had not been at least one or two yachts, aside from our own *Rachel II* and the launches, moored there. Little waves slapped against the pilings as we pulled up. Clem unloaded my luggage, or rather threw it upon the wooden slats. "Are you going to help me with these?" I asked.

"No'm. The ride over is all I agreed to." Then with an apprehensive look past my shoulder he climbed quickly back into his dilapidated boat and took off.

I was halfway up the walk to the front door when I suddenly realized the reason for Clem's hasty departure. Two huge mastiffs, barking furiously, came tearing around the corner of the house. They halted a few feet in front of me, their taut bodies drawn back on their haunches, their ugly heads raised in howling fury. We had always had dogs at Storm House, tail wagging mixed breeds mostly, but never anything as savage as these two.

"Go along!" I shouted. They ceased their barking, but did not move, crouching there, watching me, their throats rumbling with guarded menace.

Suddenly the larger one sprang at me. It happened so fast I was only conscious of a blur of dark fur and nailed claws. He caught me with his weight and I went down in a frothing mist of terror, in a boiling nightmare of snarling teeth, hot rancid breath and red flaming eyes. Instinctively, like a cornered animal, I brought my arms and knees up, rolling my



head from side to side, trying to evade those bared yellow teeth.

It couldn't have lasted more than a few seconds, yet it seemed a hellish eternity before I heard Cosette's voice, and the dogs were suddenly gone. I lay there tasting dust and sweat, too weak to rise, breathing slowly in and out. "Are you all right?" I heard Cosette ask.

"I . . . I think so." I felt along my arms. My jacket sleeve had been slashed through, but otherwise I seemed miraculously untouched. Slowly, stiffly, I got to my feet.

In the light streaming from the door I saw Cosette holding the dogs. "I'll keep them here until you get into the house," she said.

I picked up my suitcases and went past her, the dogs growling low in their throats. I walked up the shallow flight of stone steps, across the narrow terrace and into the flagged hall. Exhausted and shaken I looked dully around. I was home. My long journey was over.

But, of course, it had only begun.

## CHAPTER II

"The dogs . . ." Cosette apologized when she joined me a few minutes later. "I'm sorry about them. They're unchained at night and it completely slipped my mind to tell the boy to wait."

"They're such ugly brutes," I said, shuddering.

She gave me a long look. "You've grown into a very pretty woman."

I leaned over and kissed her leathery cheek. "Thank you, Cosette," I murmured.

Cosette would never reveal her age and although I guessed that she must have been well past sixty during my last years at Storm House I had not thought of her as old. She was that now. Her tall figure, always carried straight as a Norway pine, was slightly stooped at the shoulders. There were a host of new, unfamiliar wrinkles criss-crossing her cheeks and lining her forehead. And her dark gray streaked hair, cut short like a cap, had turned completely white. The eyes were the same, though, gray and sharp.

"Why does Phillipe keep those animals?" I asked.

"We had some trouble," Cosette replied. "The house was broken into last August. There's a lot of riff-raff passing through the village now. I suppose someone came out here and thought the house was empty."

"I can't see why . . . what with the servants. . . ."



"There are no servants," she said shortly. "There haven't been any these past six months except for a girl to help me. And the boy, Bob, who does the outside chores."

"I don't understand." No wonder the house had seemed so strange when I stepped across the threshold. It was the silence, a dead quiet which I had never associated with Storm House.

"You will have to ask Phillipe to explain."

"He's not here?"

"No, he's gone to Boston. He's closing an exhibit there and he won't be back until morning."

"I suppose I should have called him before I came."

"He wondered why we didn't hear from you," she said. "Are you hungry?"

"Famished."

She nodded and moved past me. I followed her across the hall through the large unlit dining room where the tall chairs sat like silent mourners around the empty table. They were familiar, those chairs, the table, the Dresden shepherdesses which sat upon the sideboard, familiar, yet removed, as if I were seeing them through a window of flawed glass.

We came into the kitchen and Cosette switched on the light. "How do you manage this place with just one girl?" I asked, as she went to the refrigerator.

"Marlyn is young and strong and together we do the best we can."

Marlyn—young and strong. Long, long afterwards I was to remember those words, when the terror at Storm House nullified them and made them a mockery. But at the moment I hardly gave Marlyn a passing thought. I had other things on my mind. "Mother never wrote that she was ill."

Cosette had brought out the remains of a roast beef. "It will be a cold dinner. I wasn't expecting anyone," she said as she began to slice it with a sharp knife.

We were silent while I watched her fix a plate, arranging tomatoes and cucumbers around the beef.

"I know you told me over the phone that you didn't like to

talk about it, but I can't help wanting to know," I said. "Mother . . . was she ill?"

She put the plate down before me and fetched a knife and fork and a paper napkin. I sat staring at the paper napkin. Leftovers and paper napkins. In the old days the leftovers would have been thrown to the dogs, and as for the napkin—we had always used linen at Storm House.

"I'll put the kettle on," Cosette said. "And you can fix your own coffee. We use instant now."

Instant. Mother had always scorned it. "Yes . . . yes, of course. I don't mind."

She brought me a cup and saucer. I touched her arm. "Cosette . . . please. Why can't you tell me about Mother?"

Her deep set eyes clouded over. "I can't talk about it," she repeated in a weary voice.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Perhaps . . . later."

She bit her lip and shook her head. I would have much preferred to have her scold me, than to stand there looking at me with those sad eyes. It was not like the old, tough Cosette I had known, and her tired sadness frightened me a little. "You're working too hard," I said.

"I'm glad to have things to do," she said, throwing back her shoulders and returning my sympathetic look with a hardening of her eyes. "I was never one to sit around. You know that. I may be old, but I was never weak. And I won't be so now."

That was better. I got up and took the boiling kettle from the stove and filled my cup.

"Why did you come, Laura?" she suddenly asked.

I turned. "What an odd question. I wanted to come. I wanted to see Phillipe, to talk to him to find out about Mother. I wanted to come home."

"Sometimes it is better to remember things as they were," she said.

I brought the coffee to the table and sat down. "Maybe. The place *has* changed. And it doesn't help to have you so secretive."



"I'm not being secretive. You'll find out soon enough."

"Find out what?"

"It's not my place to be the one to tell you about your mother." She rose and filled my empty water glass at the sink. "I saw Mignon," she said. "I hadn't seen her for years, but she came just before your mother died."

"Mignon?" I said incredulously. "Come now, you don't expect me to believe in ghosts anymore. You forget I'm no longer a child."

"I've seen her," she said, coming back to me. The light cast a slanting shadow across her face, and the look in her eyes took me back across the years to my childhood, the look that could always bring goosebumps to my arms.

"There is no Mignon," I said.

"She always comes when there is trouble at Storm House."

"It's your imagination," I persisted, the goosebumps spreading like a rash to my chest. "You're the last person I'd think would be the kind to see ghosts." It wasn't true, of course. Cosette, coming of peasant stock, had a strong streak of superstition. "You're . . . you're so practical."

"It's the practical people who are honest enough to admit seeing them." She leaned forward. "She's been here, Laura. And what's more. . . ." She threw a glance past me.

"What? What are you trying to tell me?" I could feel the blood draining from my face.

She gave me a long searching look. Then she straightened and rubbed her hands along the sides of her skirt. "I'll go and make up your bed."

"You needn't bother. I can do it."

"Eat your supper," she said. "It's no bother."

I ate the roast beef, the thick bread with butter, the cucumbers and the tomatoes and tasted nothing. A swarm of mysteries. The boats and the servants gone, my mother suddenly dead. And Cosette refusing to explain, Cosette only speaking of ghosts, of Mignon and "trouble."

When I finally got upstairs I saw that Cosette had built a

fire in the fireplace, and I was grateful for it. My bedroom had seemed to shrink in the intervening years. I remembered it as huge, the white canopied bed as enormous, and the gold handled bureaus spaced far apart. It was a pretty room, still large, but reduced from the extravagant grandeur of my memory. I left my suitcases on the bed and went to the window, pulling the curtains aside. The cloud bank had disappeared and there was a pale full moon riding the night sky, its cream-white light reflecting on the sea below. In the distance the dogs began to bay at it, a rising eerie sound. I shuddered and let the curtains fall in place.

My bags were a reminder that I should unpack. But I had a strange reluctance to do so. It was as if putting my belongings, the clothes I wore, my hair brushes, my creams and shampoo, into the closets and drawers would involve me in a commitment, a commitment to stay.

*You can't go home again.* It was Thomas Wolfe who had written those words. I had never felt they were truer than at that moment. It was not so much my failure to recapture a childhood memory, as the feeling that somewhere, somehow in that long journey from Paris I had missed my way and come to the wrong place, the wrong house.

I was a stranger here.

It was a stupid way to feel. I told myself, deliberately unzipping one of the canvas bags. What had I expected after eight years? I unpacked everything then, only leaving my shoes in their boxes. I wound my small traveling clock, set it by my watch and placed it on the bedside table, my toothbrush in the bathroom, my robe thrown across the foot of the bed. I was settled in. But I didn't feel settled. My nerves were still coiled tightly like unsprung wires. I sat down, picked up a magazine, and after a minute threw it from me. I leaned back staring at the walls, drumming my fingers on the arm of the chair.

Then on a sudden impulse I got up and went out and down the corridor past Phillipe's room to my mother's. She and Phillipe had connecting bedrooms, as Phillipe had al-



ways been a restless insomniac, often reading until two or three in the morning. The room was cold and under the harsh electric light looked unreal, stagey. I could see at a glance that Phillipe had not removed anything, the Tiffany lamps, his picture on the bureau, even the combs and brushes on her dressing table had not been touched. I walked over to the little room which held the wardrobes and opened them. They were fragrant with the scent of limes and mothballs. My mother's dresses were all there, each in its own cellophane wrapper, one whole section given over to day dresses, the other evening dresses of silk and linen, gold shimmering lamé and white silvery brocades. I shoved the hangers absently aside, one by one. There was a note pinned to one of the bags, not a note, really, just my name. "For Laura," it said. It was the black gown with the chiffon sleeves and the flounce.

The pain hit me then like a sudden blow, pain and a rush of tears, those tears I could not shed in my apartment in Paris, on the flight over, nor down below in the kitchen. I sank to the floor clutching at the wrapped gown, hugging it, crying openly like a forlorn, lost child. I sobbed for the passing of Rachel, Rachel whom I loved in a sort of taken-for-granted way. I wept for the past, for the loss of something I could not define—the passage of time, perhaps, an innocence, a belief that wherever I went, whatever I did, one part of me would remain solid, unchanged, my roots, the basic core of my existence untouched. I had no roots, no core. Rachel's death and Storm House had shown me that.

I went to bed and fell asleep still weeping.

It was past one when I awoke sweating from a dream in which I had been pursuing my mother dressed in a flounced, black gown. A long finger of ivory moonlight lay stretched across the bed. I stared at it stupidly, my head muddled, my brain not yet out of sleep, wondering why I was in a strange room. A clock chimed somewhere, the fire rustled in the grate and I came to full consciousness.

I sighed, rearranged the blankets and turned the pillow

over, snuggling deep within it. I listened to the crash of waves far below, to the creaking of the house as it stirred restlessly in its sleep. Then I heard another sound. Footsteps. Puzzled, I sat up, my eyes wide. They were coming along the corridor, light footsteps, as if someone were walking in stockinged feet. Who? There was no one in the house except myself, Cosette and the serving girl. They had their rooms in the servant's quarters on the main floor beyond the kitchen, far removed from this section of the house.

The footsteps paused before my door. I drew the blanket to my chin. It seemed that the room had suddenly turned cold—an icy, bone piercing cold. I sat there tense, holding my breath, listening. Had I imagined those footsteps? The moonlight streamed across my bed, thickening the dark shadows beyond. I could see nothing, but I instinctively *knew* someone was on the other side of that door.

A tiny rasping sound. The doorknob was turning! I sensed, rather than saw it, seemed to feel that stealthy twist as if the knob were in my own rigid fingers. "I saw Mignon," Cosette had said. "She's been here . . . and what's more. . . ." Had she been trying to tell me that she had seen my mother's ghost, too?

No. Mother was dead, as dead as Mignon, if Mignon had ever lived at all. It was Cosette at the door. Cosette unable to sleep. She had regretted her refusal to speak of my mother and had come up to look in on me.

"Cosette. . . ?"

I heard the footsteps as they started up again. They were leaving. Cosette had changed her mind. Exasperated, I began groping for my robe. It took a few seconds before I found it twisted among the bedclothes, a few more to find my slippers. When I came out into the corridor, it was empty. I hurried down it, turning at the angled nook where a high window let in a sheet of painted moonlight. I walked across the landing and looked down the long flight of the central staircase. It was dimly illuminated by two shaded



lamps at the bottom. I saw no one, nothing of shadow or substance. I stood there, clinging to the balustrade, a little uneasy now, a little afraid.

I thought I heard a step behind and whirled about. Only the moonlight and the wind sighing at the casement.

I hit my lip and descended the stairs. Hurrying my pace I walked swiftly through the dining room and kitchen and through another door which led to a long winding corridor and the servant's quarters. I knew which room was Cosette's—I knew every room in the house. I paused before the door and rapped softly with my knuckles. There was no response, no sound, except the soft throb of the electric generator housed in the cellar below. Turning the knob quietly, I peeked in. Cosette was asleep on the bed, one arm flung out, the other beneath her head. She stirred and turned on her side with a small groan. Softly, I closed the door.

I had to admit then what I had really felt from the minute I had emerged from my room and found the corridor empty. Cosette could not have possibly been upstairs. She would have had to run like a deer to have disappeared so quickly. There had been no one. It was all in my mind.

I retraced my steps along the winding corridor, past the closed doors, the empty rooms of the servants' who had gone—for what reason I still did not know. When I came to the main staircase I hesitated. Suppose it had not been my imagination? I dug my nails into my palms, fighting the return of my earlier fear, until now bottled up like an evil genie. This staircase, according to the legend, was one of Mignon's favorite haunts. It was there, Cosette claimed, she had most often seen the phantom. The lamplight cast patterned shadows, figures of light and dark upon the bronze carpet which led up and up into the impenetrable gloom. I wondered if *she* were up there now, watching me with sightless, hollow eyes.

It was nonsense. Childish nonsense. Nevertheless, I picked up the skirts of my robe and ran, shamelessly, like the coward I was, taking the stairs by twos. When I closed the

door to my room I was breathing heavily. Now that I had reached safety, I began to feel very foolish again. I was glad no one had seen me. Even if there was a ghost, why should I be afraid? What could a phantom do? These were the questions I was to ask myself again and again in the weeks to come, using them as charm, my own magic incantation against the deep primeval fear all of us carry. And for the moment it worked. But only for a moment. In the next, I heard the footsteps again and I froze.

They went past the door without stopping. I let out my breath and put my hand to the doorknob. I was trembling from head to foot. Where had my good sense gone? *Ghosts cannot harm you*. I opened the door and craned my neck to see. A dark shadow, tall, yet formless was moving along the passage past my mother's room. I watched as it passed a barred window, the moonlight catching a gleam of white. I was terrified. Yet some semblance of reason remained. I knew that if I should retreat, shut the door and crawl beneath the blankets in the safety of my bed as I wanted so desperately to do, my fear would never leave me; every footstep, every sound in the silence of the night would become a torment. I went out then, and silently, breathlessly on slippered feet, I followed the moving shadow. Down the long corridor, up a short flight of stairs it went, and I, my heart hammering like a thousand anvils, after it. There was another corridor here, uncarpeted like the ones below and my foot stepped upon a sunken board. The creak it made was like a shot in the silence. The figure hesitated, paused, shifting into the moonlight cascading through a high, slitted window.

I saw it then. It was not Mignon's ghost; it was not my mother's.

It was Armand's.



### CHAPTER III

There was something unreal, dream-like about that scene, the narrow strips of lunar light falling on the bare boards at spaced intervals along the dark corridor, the sound of the sea sighing far below. And that face, that remembered face turned to me, unseeing and still, like the face at the far end of a telescope.

"Armand. . . ?" A whisper only, not daring to trust my voice, my senses. "Armand, is it you?"

The silence beat like wings in the shadows. "Armand . . . ?"

"Yes," he said. "It's me."

Not an illusion, not my fancy. I ran to him then and threw my arms around him. "Armand . . . Cosette did not tell me . . ." I wanted to laugh, to cry. I felt the warm, hard ribs beneath his shirt, heard the beat of his heart. And for a moment, in the circle of his arms, it was as if I had come home at last.

Then I felt his body stiffen and he pulled away. "So Laura, you've come back." His voice was tight and cold.

I tried to look into his eyes, to find a clue to those chilly words. But they were in shadow and I could not see. "You don't seem happy about it," I said.

"Should I be?"

"Oh, Armand," I said, impulsively taking his arm. "That was a long time ago. We're grown up now."

He stepped back again as if my touch were repellent and the full light of the moon caught his features. His face was the same, the unruly lock of black hair falling over his forehead, the thin sensitive mouth, the straight arrogant nose, the dark sullen eyes. The same, yet different. The hair was longer, almost to his shoulders, and there was a shadowy stubble on his cheeks, a few lines at the corners of his eyes.

"We were grown up enough then," he said.

I was thankful that the darkness hid the sudden hot flaming of my face. "That was a rotten thing to say."

"It wasn't meant to be nice."

"You're still very bitter, aren't you?"

"And you think I shouldn't be." He leaned against the wall, his hands in his pockets.

"Armand . . . it's all in the past."

"Yes, yes. You're so right. It's in the past. Forget it, Armand, it was just a summer romance. One of those things." The flippancy in his voice cut like a whip. "I am not behaving like a gentleman. Not the way Rachel would like me to. Or you. All right then. . . ." He took my hand, shook it with his cold and lifeless one, a handshake that was more humiliating than the whiplash of his voice. "It's nice to see you, Laura," he went on in that mock-polite tone. "You're looking well. Different, more beautiful, if that's possible. And now if you'll excuse me. . . ." He made a little comic bow.

"Armand . . . I want to talk to you. I must. There are so many things. . . ."

"It's hardly the time and place. And besides what is there to say? Goodnight, Laura. . . ." He turned and I watched his shadow move along the corridor to the end. I heard a door open and close, the door to the room that had been his all the years he lived at Storm House, a room on the third floor, spare, unadorned, not like the elegant one that was mine. It wasn't that Armand could not have had his choice of rooms; neither Phillippe nor Rachel would have begrudged him. But it



sented his personality, to be alone, away from the others. And he had never complained.

In the morning, after I had dressed, I went directly to the kitchen. Cosette was there, and the girl, Marlyn, a young woman my own age with corn silk hair and a pouting underlip. "There's juice in the refrigerator," Cosette said. "I'm fixing some eggs."

"It can wait," I said impatiently. "I'd like to speak to you alone."

Cosette looked at Marlyn. The girl shrugged and shooting me a resentful look sauntered from the room.

The moment she had closed the door I turned to Cosette. "Why didn't you tell me Armand was here at Storm House?" The question had burned at me from the second I opened my eyes.

There was a look of faint surprise in her eyes. "Armand? Oh, yes. I had almost forgotten. I meant to tell you but we got to talking about other things."

"How could you forget?"

"Now, Laura, there's no need to get huffy. He's hardly ever around. You know Phillipe and he still don't get along. I doubt whether he's had three meals with us at the table. It was easy to forget. You saw him?"

"Yes. Last night," I answered, somewhat mollified. "He was prowling the corridors."

"Restless. He was always a restless boy." She shook her head.

"How long has he been back?"

She pursed her lips. "He came a week before your mother died. I think. He hasn't been here very long."

"Did he say where he's been? Why no one has heard from him in all these years?"

"He didn't say and I didn't ask. He never was much of a talker . . . at least not to me."

She went to the refrigerator and got a pitcher of orange juice and poured me a glass. "He hates me," I said, taking the glass from her.

"He's the kind who hates everybody. Even himself."

"No. That's not true." The orange juice was bitter and tasted faintly of onions. "He loved me once."

Cosette made an impatient sound in the back of her throat. "You surely don't regret leaving? Sending you away, as far as I can see, was the wisest thing Rachel ever did. Armand would have never made a good husband. Moody, aimless, bad tempered." She reached over and touched my hand. Like her earlier show of sadness it surprised, almost startled me. Cosette was not the one to display affection or tenderness. "You ought to have a husband, the kind who'll make you happy. A respectable man."

"Oh, Cosette, we don't believe in that myth anymore. No one can *make* another person happy."

"I'm old fashioned," she said, pressing her lips together. "I think the right husband can."

Phillipe returned at noon. I heard the launch from the kitchen and ran out to the terrace to meet him. His face registered surprise, then delight. He hugged me, kissing my cheek. "Laura. . . !"

Phillipe looked ill, and years older. His face was drawn, his thin hair, wispiest and carefully combed to conceal a widening bald spot.

"I didn't see your cablegram until Wednesday," I said. Was it only the day before yesterday? "I was away."

"I guessed as much when we didn't hear from you. Did you get my letter?"

"No. I didn't wait for it. I decided to come instead."

"Good. I'm happy that you did." He turned and I saw two people, a man and woman walking up from the dock. "Kyle Brennan," Phillipe said. "My agent. You remember him? And his wife, Shirley?"

"Yes . . . yes," I said, forcing a smile. I remembered Kyle Brennan and I did not like him. He was a big man, his good looks long gone to seed from loose living and too many martinis. His smile was ready and familiar, his eyes the kind that



were never still. Although my mother never said as much I always suspected that she had not liked him either.

"Well," he said with that beefy smile of his, "if it isn't our little Laura. All grown up!" His eyes went over me approvingly.

To avoid his outstretched hand I quickly put out my own to his wife who stood behind him. "Shirley," I murmured, "how nice." I did not know Shirley as well as Kyle. I remembered her only as thin, with reddish hair and a grating, harsh voice.

"What a surprise," she said. She did not make it sound like a pleasant one. "Your mother's death must have been an awful shock."

"Yes, it was."

"Shall we go into the house?" Phillipe said, linking his arm in mine. The Brennans fell into step behind us. It was a disappointment, an annoying one, having the Brennans there. I had wanted to speak to Phillipe alone.

We went into the library, an enormous room with a large bow window. "I'll fix us a drink," said Kyle, going to the bar in the corner. "Laura. . . ?"

"No, thanks."

Perhaps the Brennans had only come to lunch, I thought hopefully. They would stay for the meal, a polite half hour or so afterwards, and then they would leave. When Shirley got up and joined Kyle at the bar I leaned toward Phillipe and whispered, "Are they staying the day?"

"No . . . they'll be here for a while. As houseguests." And then, because my face must have dropped, he said, "You and I can have a talk after lunch. I'm sorry, I. . . ."

"It's all right, Phillipe, I can wait. How did the show go?"

"Fairly well, I suppose," he said in a tired, dispirited voice.

Kyle, with drink in hand, came across the room. "I heard that, Phillipe. Fairly well, my foot. Great! Simply superb!" The one thing I could give Kyle credit for was his absolute faith in Phillipe and Phillipe's talent as an artist. I suppose

that was why Phillipe had such a liking for the man. Kyle had worked zealously over the years to make a name for his client and in a small way he had succeeded.

"We got some damned good reviews, too," Kyle added. He went on to talk about the exhibit, about people who had come to the gallery, a Mrs. Tibson who had got drunk on champagne at the opening, a Mr. Harvey who had bought three paintings—strangers whose names meant nothing to me. It seemed sacrilegious to me sitting there with Kyle talking on, and Rachel's favorite chair by the fireplace empty, the life she had been so intimately involved in seemingly uninterrupted by her passing.

Lunch was an irritating, depressing meal. Armand had not appeared. I had not really expected him to, not since Cosette had told me that he rarely showed for meals. Still, I was disappointed. Toward the last, as we were having coffee, Phillipe said to me, "Come up to the studio. I won't be working, so it's all right."

There had always been an iron-bound rule in our house. Phillipe was never, never to be disturbed in his studio.

They were still drinking their coffee when I excused myself and ran upstairs to get a sweater. I opened the door to my room and froze.

Armand was sitting in the chair by the window, reading a book. "I hope you don't mind," he said, looking up without surprise. "But this is a book you borrowed from me." He held it out. An old copy of *Moby Dick*.

"You have a long memory," I said. "I'd quite forgotten."

"Yes, I suppose you have. You're very good at that."

I ignored his remark and went to the closet.

"I'll take the book along with me," I heard him say behind me.

"Don't let me disturb you," I said tartly, turning my head. "I just came up for a sweater."

"I was going anyway." He tucked the book under his arm and walked from the room.

I knew Armand well enough to realize that he had been



lying. He had not come to my room for an old tattered book. Why then had he been there? Reviving old memories? Hardly. His, I had already seen, needed no reviving. *Moby Dick*, indeed!

Still mystified by Armand I got the sweater and went up the circular staircase to the turret which housed Phillipe's studio. He was waiting for me. "I'm sorry your homecoming had to be like this," he said.

The studio, spacious and airy, had a three hundred and sixty degree view of the Island and the sea beyond. "If I had known you were coming I would have made a point of being home," he apologized. "And the Brennans. . . ." He ran his hand through his hair. "I don't know where to begin. Sit down, sit down, Laura."

I sat in a chair facing the large easel. A half finished portrait of a woman, her hair fixed in gray soft waves above a broad forehead, was on it.

"I try to keep working," Phillipe said, waving at the easel. "I try to keep busy. I . . . it doesn't mean much to me anymore." His voice broke. He took out a large handkerchief and blew his nose.

I looked away. There were only a few small pictures in the studio, another easel covered with a cloth. I assumed that the rest, those he hadn't sold, had not been removed from the gallery. Phillipe painted in oils, mostly portraits. He was a good artist, a talented one, I thought. He painted in the classic style, his colors warm and rich, the faces of his models flowing from the canvas in such beautiful detail, alive and vibrant. I don't think he made a whole lot of money from his pictures, though. The vogue, the demand for representative art had long since passed. People wanted abstracts. "symbolic dabs of paint—conversation pieces," as mother had termed it.

Phillipe cleared his throat and took a cigarette from the pack below the easel. He lit it and went to the window. I watched him as he stood there, his back to me, gazing out at the sea. His silence drew a cold ring about my heart. Why

didn't he speak? Why were he and Cosette so reluctant to explain the cause of my mother's death? I waited and waited, my apprehension growing.

"She didn't want to tell you," he said at last without turning. "I told her to write to you and let you know . . . that you were a big girl now and that it wouldn't matter as much as she thought it would."

"Matter?" I said, frightened now. "What wouldn't matter? What is it?"

"It all started about six months ago. . . ."

"Cancer?" I asked with dry lips.

"No . . . no. Not cancer. But it might as well have been. It killed her in the end."

"What. . . ? What killed her?" I sat on the edge of my chair. Phillipe had always been somewhat dramatic. He couldn't help it. But why must he take this long way around to tell me what I wanted to know?

"Laura . . . your mother lost all her money. Every dime of it. Gone. Gone as if she had gambled it on the turn of a wheel."

"Her money? But . . . but she had so much. I didn't think. . . ."

"Nor did we. Poor investments, the stock market taking a dive. That was bad enough . . . but the lawyer her money and securities were entrusted to simply took the whole caboodle and skipped the country."

"Not Barry!" I said shocked. Barry Scofield was my real father's younger brother. I knew he belonged to the firm which handled mother's estate.

"No . . . not Barry. He's a criminal lawyer. He has nothing to do with the trust end of it. It was Peterson. Sam Peterson. You didn't know him."

"I still don't understand. You say this all happened six months ago. I've been getting checks regularly. . . ."

"Your money is in a separate trust, Laura. Your father set it up that way. It isn't much, as you are probably aware. . . ."

I was ashamed to say that I wasn't. Mother had always



supplemented my allowance with generous gifts of money at Christmas and on birthdays. I had never had reason to ask whose money was whose or where it came from.

" . . . but it is yours and no one can get at it."

He ran his hand through his sparse hair, ruffling it in little peaks. It gave him a lost look, that and the misery in his eyes. "It hit her hard. Very hard. We had to get rid of the servants, of course, the maids, the gardeners, Roberts, everybody, except Cosette and Marlyn and Bob. We had to reduce Cosette's pay. That bothered Rachel a lot. Although Cosette didn't mind. She's family, you know. She'd scrub floor on her hands and knees for Rachel if it was necessary. She . . . oh, God. . . ." He sighed. "Rachel . . . Rachel. You know how your mother was. . . ."

He picked up a paint brush, long, thin, black, and began twisting it in his fingers. "She sold whatever she could, all that was worth anything, to pay off our bills. She didn't like to owe money. Didn't think it was right. And, naturally, we had to stop entertaining." His lips formed a tortured smile. "Fair weather friends. As soon as the good food and booze dried up most of them evaporated like the snows of May." He pointed the brush at me. "But not the Brennans. You might not like them—Rachel didn't either. Pushy, not very refined. Kyle's got a roving eye and Shirley, a shrewish tongue, but they're loyal. That's what counts. They're loyal."

"Yes, I know they are." I was sure that Phillipe had sensed my resentment of the Brennans and I felt a little ashamed.

"Rachel was a proud woman," Phillipe went on. "It wasn't the money, per se, that counted. It was the fact that she had to accept a very different way of life. The well-staffed house, the dinner parties, our trips abroad—no more. She couldn't seem to face it." He began to pace up and down in front of the easel still twisting the brush in his hands. "The arguments we had. I can't begin to tell you. We, who rarely quarreled. I don't make much with my paintings,

as you know. But we could have managed, could have managed." He turned to me, his eyes asking for approval.

"I'm sure you could, Phillipe," I said.

"I tried to tell her . . . showed her with figures, estimates, how we could live. That we wouldn't be paupers, forced to accept charity. But she wouldn't listen . . . wouldn't. . . ." He shook his head. "She fell into a depression. Wouldn't answer the telephone, wouldn't go out. The few friends we had left kept calling. She would have nothing to do with them. I begged her to see a doctor. . . ."

I sat on the edge of the chair staring at him, not saying anything. I knew what was coming, what Phillipe was going to say, and I tried to brace myself for the shock. But when it came it hit me like the sudden shattering of glass.

"She . . . she took her own life." The black stem of the paintbrush snapped in his fingers. "She committed suicide."



## CHAPTER IV

Depression. Suicide. The words seemed meaningless. They didn't make sense. Not in the same context as Rachel. My mother take her own life? It was as if Phillipe had been talking about some woman, a stranger . . . someone I had never really known. It was easier to believe that lightning had struck Storm House, shattered, dissolved its rock and stone instantly, leaving only little anonymous heaps of sand. Rachel, strong, self-contained Rachel with that determined jaw, those capable hands, turning against herself?

"How did it happen?" I asked.

Phillipe sat heavily down on a chair. "It's agony to watch a strong person break down, to have to stand by helplessly and not know what to do. Weekends were always the worst. The house had always been so full of people . . . and now it was empty. That last weekend she had been even more depressed than usual. Weeping. Can you imagine Rachel weeping? But by Tuesday she seemed better—much better. Not her old self, but better." He looked away from me. "They say that once a potential suicide comes to a decision to take his own life, he always appears more cheerful, brighter just before the act. Of course, I wasn't a psychiatrist, I couldn't read the signs. I was just happy to see her eating again, smiling even. That's the way she was when I saw her that morning. I did not see her alive again. . . ."

He lit a cigarette. I saw that his hands were trembling. "I

was up here all that day, working on Mrs. Carston's portrait from a photograph. She had wanted it in a hurry. It was a good commission . . . and . . . I stayed until dinner time. I went down to the bedroom to change. Rachel was not in her room and I thought she might be in the library. She wasn't. Cosette came in. She said she was worried about Rachel. "She went out for a walk over an hour ago and she's not back," I remember her telling me. We waited another half hour. It was starting to get dark. I went out to look for her. The Brennans were here and they went with me. Armand and the boy, Bob. We all went." He took his handkerchief out and mopped his brow. "She. . . . We found her body at the foot of Cliff's Edge. She must have jumped from there."

I sat rigid, in shock, my eyes fastened to Phillipe's face, unable to speak.

"At first I thought that she had slipped, fallen. That's what I wanted to believe. But she left a note, Laura. There wasn't—isn't any doubt of it."

He got up and went to a large scarred worktable behind the easel and opened a drawer. He came back, a small sheet of notepaper in his hand. "This . . . read it."

I took it from him gingerly. I recognized the paper, Rachel's own special stationary, creamy white with the gold initial "R" emblazoned at the top. It was dated Tuesday. *I can't go on with this, it read. I simply can't. I must put a stop to it. And there is only one way, Phillipe, dear Phillipe. I love you. Please forgive me. And that was all.*

I tried to picture my mother sitting at her dressing table, her head with its heavy crown of hair bent over the paper, the pen in her hand, writing, and the picture clouded in a mist of tears. I looked up at Phillipe. His eyes too were dim, reddened at the lids.

"I am to blame," he said. "I take the whole blame. I should have watched her, knowing her condition. I should never have gone up to the studio that day. I should have known." His voice broke and he got up and put the note back in the drawer. I saw his shoulders move convulsively. I



went and put my arm about him. "Phillipe, you mustn't blame yourself."

He turned his face toward me in sudden anger. "And why not? Why not? I was here, in this place, this . . . place . . . all absorbed in my painting when she . . . she. . . ." He wrenched himself away from me. "I was working on this damn imbecile's picture," he said, standing in front of the easel. "A shallow-minded woman, whose only claim to glory is that she is the wife of a power-hungry man." He thrust his fist at it.

"Phillipe!"

He put his hand to head. "All right. All right, I know. I know I have to go on. That's what they tell me. Everything, everyone has to go on. And you . . . God, Laura. What an exhibition. It isn't helping you at all, is it?"

"No . . . I . . ." I did not know what to say. I understood why Cosette could not speak of my mother's death. Born and raised in the Catholic faith, Rachel's suicide was a double horror to her.

"I . . . I was with her for twenty years," Phillipe was saying. "We were never separated, not for more than a day or two . . . never separated. It's hard." He looked around. "I thought of shutting up the house. Going away. . . ."

"Come to Paris with me," I said impulsively. "You can paint there."

He shook his head. "No. No . . . this is my home. Aside from the financial problems of a move . . . I can't leave Storm House. I was born here and here I shall die." He must have seen the startled look on my face. "Don't worry, Laura. I'm too much of a coward to jump from Cliff's Edge—or anything like that. I'll die, like anyone else, when my time comes."

He began to talk of Rachel again, lashing himself with self-blame, until I, no longer able to bear it, changed the subject and asked him about Armand.

"He said he came back because he was broke," Phillipe told me. "Between jobs, was the way he put it."

"What was he doing all these years?"

Phillipe shrugged. "Nothing much. I guess. Just drifting, humming around from what I could gather."

"Did he say why he quit college?"

"He decided it wasn't for him." There was derision in his voice. "After we had spent a not inconsiderable sum on his education, pulling strings to get him into Eames in the first place, the only thing he could say was, 'I didn't like it.'"

"You weren't exactly overjoyed to see him come back, I suppose."

He gave me a sharp look. "I wasn't overwhelmed. No, I am sorry, Laura. God knows I tried when he first came to Storm House as a child, but he was never easy to get along with. And he hasn't changed. We—Rachel and I—didn't turn him away, after all he is my own flesh and blood. But I did tell him that he couldn't stay indefinitely, that I didn't want any moochers hanging around. I said we'd tide him over until he found something to do. He's been here several weeks now and it doesn't look like he's made any effort to get a job. All he does is tinker with his old sailboat down at Fisherman's Cove."

"The *Caravelle*?" Armand had bought the sixteen-foot sailboat, old and in need of repair even then, when he was fifteen from money he had earned lobstering during the summer months.

"He left it at the Cove when he went away to school and its been rotting there ever since."

"We used to have such good times with that funny boat," I mused.

"Don't tell me you still have a crush on Armand."

"It wasn't a crush, Phillipe."

"All right then. You thought you were in love with him. You certainly don't think so now, do you?"

I looked past him through the window where a gull, wings outstretched, was lazily sailing on a current of wind. "No," I said slowly. "I suppose not."

He sighed. "It never would have worked. You can see for



myself that he's come to nothing, just as Rachel predicted. She was right in sending him away."

"That's what Cosette said. He's still bitter about it."

"Armand is always bitter. He enjoys his grudges."

"Well, I do think he was badly treated."

"There you go," said Phillipe, smiling. "Taking up for him again."

Our discussion of Armand disturbed me. It was true that Rachel had wounded his pride, that I, whom he had trusted, had abandoned him. True that he had not forgotten it. But I did not think Armand particularly enjoyed his resentment. Nor did I. For I could not forget his dark, bitter face in the moonlight, his mocking voice, his cold withdrawal from my touch. Why did we have to remain enemies because of something that had happened eight years ago? If only he would give me the chance to explain, to make him understand. Suddenly it seemed terribly important that I vindicate myself in his eyes.

As soon as I left Phillipe I went in search of Armand. He was not in his room, nor was he in the adjacent turret, one of our favorite game places when we were small. There was another favorite place, Armand's alone, a mock dungeon in the cellar. He had fixed up the narrow cell as a retreat, a "hidey hole" where he could go to nurse his wounds after a quarrel with Phillipe or Rachel—and sometimes me. I thought I might find him there.

The cellar had always been a spooky place, raising the same frosty goosebumps along my arms as Cosette's tales of Mignon. According to the legend, Mignon had been tortured there by her satanic husband, and the wind that often shrieked through the barred air vents were supposedly the echo of her tormented screams. When we were children, bored with other games on rainy days, we would go down to the cellar to play hide and seek among its winding passages, swooping and yelling in the echoing tunnels, scaring each other into wild hysterical laughter.

I had forgotten how dim the cellar was, how badly lit, how

the shadows crouched and lunged under the swinging light. And as I descended the deep stone stairs I experienced the same sensation as when I had seen Storm House rising out of the sea that first night, a queer uneasiness, like a small pain, nestling under my ribs. I felt curiously open, vulnerable to something I could not name, something malevolent that prowled unseen just beyond my view. It seemed to be all around me, in the wet, sweating stones, the scurrying sounds of mice, the brackish, rank air, and I had the urge to turn and flee, going back the way I had come.

I didn't, of course. I had not given in to my fear the night before when I had discovered my "ghost" to be Armand; why should I do so now? Still I could not bring myself to be that calm, rational person I thought I ought to be and as I hurried past the wine room and down the narrow, low-ceilinged passage, my heels making a hollow clip-clop on the cobblestones, I found that my mouth had gone dry and that my heart was loping along even as my shadow before me. Pausing to switch on another light (the switches were placed at intervals along the walls), I thought I heard the sound of footsteps stopping just a split second after mine. I stood a moment peering back into the dimness. There was nothing but the cobwebbed light bulbs swaying in the dusty draft.

I went on and turning a corner found myself at the door of the dungeon which had served as Armand's sanctuary. The crude sign was still there, blurred now by time and damp. **PRIVATE. KEEP OUT. MAN BEING TORTURED.** Armand had only allowed me inside twice. I knocked out of habit, as I had done years earlier when I had come to coax him out of a sulk. "Armand. . . ?"

The wind moaned softly, feeling its way through the tunneled passages. Shivering, I pushed open the door and stepped across the threshold. Light from a narrow grate revealed the dust and the greenish mold growing in the corners, the rusting chains and rings along the walls, the thumbscrew racks. How macabre children can be, I thought, remembering my interest when Armand had explained the racks to me.



At that moment the wind gave one wild screech through the passage outside and the flesh seemed to dissolve from my bones. I turned to go and as I did so, I caught the fleeting impression of a shadow advancing toward the opened door. I stood frozen, shriveled in terror. The shadow was there again, coming closer. I heard the sound of footsteps, like nailed boots ringing on hollow stone. A sudden vision of Pierre Tourand, black bearded, mad eyed, hunting the dungeons for his unfaithful wife, rose before me.

The next instant I was staring into Kyle Brennan's blood veined eyes.

"Looking for something?" he asked with a cocky smile.

"Phew. . . !" I let out my breath. "I thought you were a ghost." I gave a little laugh, a silly, high-pitched giggle.

"Glad it isn't?" He came into the room.

"You don't know how glad," I assured him. "This is one scary place."

"That it is. What's a nice girl like you doing in a dungeon?" His smile was intimate, unpleasant.

"I was looking for Armand," I said. Now that Kyle had rescued me from my fright and it was over, I began to feel uncomfortable in his presence.

"Still sweet on him?" There was a moist gleam in his eyes.

I did not answer but made a move to step past him. He put his hand on my arm. It was warm, clammy. "You've grown into a real beauty."

"Thank you for the compliment," I said. "But I really have to go upstairs."

"Why? What's the hurry? Dinner won't be for hours." His hand began to caress my arm. Up and down like a slithery snake.

I shook it free. "Listen, Kyle," my cheeks were burning. "you might be a good friend of Phillipe's, but that friendship doesn't include me."

"I don't want you as a friend," he said, grabbing my wrists and drawing me to him.

I smelled his beery breath, saw his mouth wet and loose.

Anger and revulsion rose in me like a flame and I snatched my wrists away. "Keep your hands to yourself, or I'll speak to Phillipe. He might not want you as a friend either. Now get out of my way!"

He gave me his self-assured smile again. "You're a prude, just like your mother. But something tells me you'll change your mind." He moved aside and I fled.

I did not find Armand until the next morning. I had gone for a walk along the high path which skirted the shore leading to Cliff's Edge. Climbing to the rocky ledge, I saw him there. He was sitting on a flat rock, his face turned from me, looking out to sea. "Armand. . . !" I called. He moved his head around and gave me an indifferent glance. "Armand," I said, reaching his side, "you've been avoiding me." He looked rumpled, unshaven. His faded jersey was torn at the elbows.

"I haven't made a point of avoiding you," he said.

I sat down beside him. The weather had become cool and blustery, as it often does in Maine in early fall, and there was a strong wind blowing in from the Atlantic. We both sat in silence watching the gulls as they hovered above the choppy water, crying and wheeling in circles, flapping their spread wings. I looked down at the jagged rocks below where the white foamed waves broke with a sullen roar and thought of Rachel lying among them, her neck twisted at a grotesque angle, her long hair loosened from its pins floating like anchored seaweed in the wash.

"Why have I suddenly become so important to you?" Armand said.

"Whether I attach importance to you or not doesn't matter." I chose my words carefully. "What does matter is that you understand—try to understand. . . ." He did not look at me but kept his eyes on the gulls. "I make no excuses. Neither do I apologize. I was fifteen. I had come into a new environment and for a while I was very unhappy. But I was not—am not—one to brood or to be unhappy for long." I gave him a sidelong glance, but his face remained as stony as



the rock on which we sat. "I made friends. I became involved with them, their activities, the school. Life-long vows are hard for a teenager to stick to. . . ." My voice trailed off. "Later, when Mother wrote that you had left college, that no one had heard from you . . . well I just assumed that the same thing had happened to you, that you felt the same way."

A muscle moved in his jaw but still he did not speak.

"After Switzerland," I continued, "I went to school at the Sorbonne. I became interested in history and French. I hope someday to teach it."

"I see," he said at last. "All books and classes and career. That's pretty damned hard to believe. How is it you haven't managed to snag a rich husband yet?"

"I haven't looked for one," I answered.

"You must have had some offers."

"A few."

"I'll bet," he said bitterly, looking me up and down.

"You needn't be nasty about it."

"I'm a nasty person. Or haven't you heard?" He turned back to the sea.

"God, don't we feel sorry for ourselves."

Another long silence while I struggled to swallow my anger. We would end up quarreling and the rift between us would be worse than before. "And what about you?" I asked, after a while. "What have you been doing?"

"Nothing much." Two words, clipped and short.

"Aren't you interested in anything? I mean, after all, you're. . . ."

"Twenty-seven? Right. And by now I should have found myself, as they . . ." he pointed back toward the house, ". . . never stop telling me." He picked up a large stone and hurled it into the sea.

"How . . . how have you managed to live?" I wanted to know.

"An odd job here and there."

"What kind of jobs?"

He gave me a long look. "Nothing you'd consider suitable."

We fell into another silence, a painful one for me. I wished that I could get behind Armand's stiff mask, inside his head, delve into his thoughts. It hurt to think that once we had been very close, had confided in each other freely. And now I could not see a way to breach the barrier. The wall which he had built against the others had grown higher, thicker, excluding even me.

"It's a long way down," he said suddenly, leaning forward and looking at the rocks below.

"Phillipe says you were here . . . when . . . when it happened."

"Yes. I found her."

"You?"

He turned and gave me an odd look. "We were all searching for her that night. I happened to be the one who found her. Does that seem strange?"

"No . . . I . . . he . . . Phillipe didn't mention it. That's all." Then, "I wish that I had been here."

"She wasn't a pretty sight."

"I don't mean that. I mean before . . . before she died."

"You've never seen anyone who has died by violence?"

"Violence?" I asked in surprise.

"I mean someone who hasn't died peacefully in their bed."

"No. Have you?"

"Yes . . . I killed a man once."

"In the war. . . ?"

He hesitated a moment. "Yes . . . I suppose you'd call it that." He got to his feet.

"Armand . . . I was hoping that we could be friends," I said, rising with him.

"You'd like that?" For a moment I thought I saw a softening in his eyes.

"Yes . . . yes, I would. Very much."

"I don't see how." I had been mistaken. The same



unplacable look was there. "Laura, I think the best thing for you to do is to go back. Go back to wherever you came from, Paris, Switzerland. Anywhere."

"Why do you want me to go?"

"Is there any reason to stay?" he countered.

"No . . . I guess not." I looked out to the horizon, then back at him. The wind catching at his hair, sweeping it from his forehead, gave his face a mystic look, like one of those Indian masks in a museum. "Damn it," I said, the repressed anger rising again. "You're not the least bit . . . human. You're worse than a jackass. What kind of great big secret has your life been anyway?"

For some crazy reason, that last remark finally pierced his stubborn shield. His face darkened like a cloud. "What do you know about life? About anything?" He gripped my shoulders tightly, his nails digging into my flesh. His eyes were like midnight. "Just don't keep needling me."

"I . . . I only meant. . . ."

"You meant to get me where I lived. Right?"

"I . . . ." For a few wild moments I was sure that he had lost his mind, that in the years between some dark seed inside his brain, one that I had not known about, had grown and blossomed into madness. And I thought, too, of the precipice at my back, how one swift push could send me hurtling to death on the sharp rocks below. "Armand . . . ." my voice trembled. "You're hurting me."

The cloud passed as suddenly as it had come. He released me. "Sorry." He took my arm and helped me down to the path below. "It's not the safest place in the world up there," he said. "It should be fenced off."

And then he walked swiftly away from me, down the pebbled path, his dark hair beating about his face in the wind.

## CHAPTER V

I think it was at dinner that night that I first became aware of Marlyn and her fancy for Phillipe. I had not noticed it before, I suppose, because either I had been too absorbed in my own thoughts or she had been careful to hide it. But on this night her behavior was so blatant, a blind man could have seen how smitten she was. Each time she handed the serving dish to Phillipe, she put on an enormous, beguiling smile and leaned provocatively over, so that one ample breast brushed his shoulder. She would mutter something about this chop being the larger one, or this vegetable being his favorite, coaxing him to take it. At first I thought that Marlyn's flirtatious manner was the way she approached men, any man. But she made no special effort to smile or to please Kyle and as the meal progressed I saw that she had eyes only for Phillipe, as if the rest of us hardly existed. I wondered if my mother had noticed those seductive looks she gave Phillipe. It would have amused her, I was sure. Rachel did not have an envious bone in her body. As far as I knew she had never been jealous of Phillipe. She had never had reason to be. Phillipe was one of those old-fashioned men with a very strong sense of family (the reason he had taken Armand in), and his marriage vows were a serious matter to him. It was not that Phillipe was a prig—he had an eye for a beautiful woman as well as the next man. But he had once told me that he was basically a monogamous



creature, and that he never understood his friends who invested so much time and energy into their extramarital affairs. Aside from that I did not believe Marlyn's overripe beauty would appeal to him.

So it was a shock to me when later that evening I came across a half-finished portrait of a girl, unmistakably Marlyn's—a Marlyn in the nude. At Phillipe's request I had gone up to his studio to discuss the disposal of my mother's personal belongings. He was busy finishing some details at the easel, and in the meanwhile I strolled about the studio, peering at the sketches and rough drawings along the walls. The portrait was in the corner on a small easel covered with a piece of cloth and when I lifted it, Marlyn's china blue eyes looked out at me. Her head was turned back over a bare shoulder and breast, her pouting mouth curved into an impish smile as if she were enjoying a huge joke at my expense.

"Is this Marlyn?" I asked, breaking the silence.

"What. . . ? What?"

"This picture, this oil. . . ."

Phillipe lifted his eyes over the rims of his glasses.

"Mmmmm. Yes. What about it?"

"Is it Marlyn?"

"Yes. Laura, please. Another five minutes and I'll be through with this. Okay?"

I waited. He made a few more strokes, then carefully washed his brushes at a sink in the corner. "Now . . ." he said, wiping his hands on a towel, "we can talk. What's troubling you?"

"This portrait of Marlyn. . . ."

"Mmmmm." He stood before it a moment. "No. It's all wrong. Not what I had in mind, at all."

"She posed for you this . . . this way?"

He looked at me in surprise. "Of course, she did. You know I've done nudes before. You're not shocked, for God's sake."

"No, but . . . but Phillipe that girl's got a terrible case on you. . . ."

"You don't have to tell *me* about it. That was one of the problems. She wouldn't sit still, kept wiggling her behind, batting those silly eyes. I finally had to tell her to forget it."

I grinned at him. He looked at the picture, then at my broad smile. "Laura, you didn't think. . . ." He pointed at Marlyn's likeness. "Oh, for God's sake. You ought to know me better than that."

We both laughed.

If there had been any lingering doubt in my mind concerning Phillipe's relationship to Marlyn, it was laid to rest that same night. It was late, I remember, around eleven-thirty and I was in bed reading when I heard footsteps coming along the corridor. They were light footsteps and ordinarily I would not have heard them at all. But a strange thing had happened to me since my return to Storm House. It seemed that my hearing had become unusually acute. I know now that it was because my nerves were honed to a razor edge, that my visceral self was in a constant state of anxious expectancy, that subconsciously, even asleep, I was listening, waiting for a sound to break the unnatural silence which seemed to press down upon the house at nightfall.

So I listened to those footsteps, the book rigid in my hands. I knew that Phillipe had gone to his room earlier and I thought it might be Armand. But these were light, pattering steps and as they passed my door there was a faint swish-swishing sound, like the brush of a long garment along the floor. I got out of bed and carefully cracked open the door. Peering down the dim corridor I saw the faint, filmy outline of a figure standing at Phillipe's door and my heart began its crazy little dance. The next moment the figure rapped on the door, a very unwraith-like rap and I heard Phillipe's voice. "Who is it?"

"Marlyn," was the response, very low, sweet as honey.

"Go away, Marlyn," I heard Phillipe call loudly.

"Aren't you going to let me in? I have something to tell you," Marlyn said.



I knew that I had no right to be standing there behind the partially opened door, watching with one eye, listening, but curiosity overcame my sense of propriety.

There was a small silence and I heard Phillipe's door open. "Listen Marlyn. And listen closely, because this is the last time I'm going to say this, my dear. I'm old enough to be your father. I am not, I repeat, *not* interested. Now run along and be a good girl. Okay?"

He shut the door, and as I was closing mine, Marlyn turned. I did not think she had seen me, but she must have noticed the light from my doorway and I felt like a guilty child who has been accidentally observed stealing from a neighbor's orchard with the forbidden apple in his hand. I was not surprised, a moment later, to hear the angry jiggling of my door knob.

"Who is it?" I called, pretending innocence.

"Open up."

The negligée Marlyn was wearing and the gown beneath were so thin as to be transparent. The gown, banded at the hem with satin, like the negligée, was slashed to the waist. Marlyn was beautifully endowed.

"You were spying," she accused.

"I heard someone knock, and I thought. . . ."

"You were spying," she repeated.

"Why should I?"

She was fully made up as if she were about to step in front of a movie camera, the dark mascara and false eyelashes startling in her doll-like, chalk-white face. Without the paint she would have been a very pretty girl. "Phillipe's a big boy, now," she said. "He doesn't need a caretaker or a Mama."

"No. I don't think he does either. He sounds like he's able to take care of himself."

"So you *were* spying."

"I couldn't help hearing what he had to say."

"He only talks that way because of you." Her voice rose. "Listening at keyholes. . . ."

Afraid that Phillipe might overhear us, and not wanting him to think Marlyn's accusation true, I said, "You'd better come in."

She swished past me in a pout. "Now," I said when I had closed the door, "just what did you mean by that last remark?"

"I'd get somewhere with him if he didn't have to watch himself in front of you."

"Get somewhere?" I repeated. "Where? In his bed?"

"Don't get smart." She sat down on the stool at the dressing table and crossed her legs. "He's really nuts about me. He's been holding back, first because of his wife, and now you."

"That's not his story."

"What else can he say?" She fluttered those black, sticky lashes at me.

"You . . . you've got a big imagination, not to speak of an ego."

"He's a man, isn't he? Married to that stick all these years, not knowing what a real woman's like."

"You'd better watch it," I warned angrily. "I don't think you have any idea of what a *real* woman is. Look at you! You look like some kind of cheap imitation of Marilyn Monroe."

"You noticed the resemblance?" She turned and looked into the mirror, wiggling her shoulders.

"Throwing yourself at Phillipe . . ." I went on.

She turned back to me. "That's wrong. I'm not throwing myself at Phillipe. I'm not that kind." She fluffed up her hair. "What I want . . . really . . . Do you want to know?"

"No," I said. "I don't want to know."

"I'll tell you anyway," She rose and faced me. "I want to be the next Mrs. Tourand."

When I could find my voice, I said, "You're out of your mind. Do you think he has money? Is that it? It's certainly not his looks. He's more than twice your age."



"Don't give me any stupid lectures. I want to be Mrs. Tourand. I want to be *somebody*."

"Somebody?" My eyes went over her.

Her eyes changed color, the blue blazing into violet. "You think I'm not good enough, is that it? Well, you'll see. And if you stand in my way," she shook a lacquered finger under my nose, "you'll be sorry."

It was the finger that did it. Through a red haze, I shouted, "Get out! Go on, leave! *Now!*"

With slow deliberation she undulated to the door, then turned. "And don't ask Cosette to fire me. Because she won't."

I glared at the closed door, my fists tightly clenched. I ought to laugh, I told myself. She's a shallow-brained girl playing the part of a sexy blonde, and overdoing it to the point of absurdity. Yet I felt less like laughing than I ever had in my life.

The next day I talked to Cosette when she was alone in the kitchen. I had thought Marlyn's parting words about Cosette not firing her were spoken out of sheer bravado. I certainly had no intention of asking Cosette to get rid of Marlyn. Not even Mother interfered with Cosette's prerogative to hire and fire the help, especially since Cosette's standards were as high as her own. But I was curious as to why she kept Marlyn on when the girl's behavior was the kind she would not have tolerated in any other servant.

To my surprise, Cosette defended Marlyn. "She's a good worker, not lazy like most, even if she's a bit sassy. Besides, help is very hard to get these days and there aren't many who will come over and stay on the Island anymore."

"But she's . . . she's chasing Phillipe. Isn't he a little annoyed with her?" I wasn't about to put myself in the role of tattler and tell her of the conversation I had overheard between Phillipe and Marlyn the night before.

"Oh," Cosette replied, "he laughs at her. So did Rachel when she was alive. Marlyn is really harmless."

Harmless or not I ran head on into Marlyn as I left the kitchen. I was sure she had been listening to us outside the door. She did not say anything but stared defiantly at me, that queer violet blaze to her eyes. Her savage look gave me a fleeting insight into what lay beyond those fluttering, spidery lashes. There was cunning there, the cunning of an animal, a feline huntress who knows what it wants and relentlessly tracks it down with calculating, deadly persistence. I was not afraid of her then, not yet, but there would come a time when I would come to know and to fear her shadow, the soft, rustling sound of her stalking footsteps.

Marlyn was not the only one at Storm House who troubled me. There was Armand, of course. And Kyle Brennan. I was constantly aware of those blood-veined eyes watching, assessing me, and even though I tried to avoid him as much as possible, I could not escape the mealtime ordeal when he would be sitting across the table, throwing me little knowing looks. He, in his own way, I knew, could be as persevering as Marlyn.

There was yet another whom I came to distrust and to fear. It was Shirley Brennan. She and I had little in common. Our infrequent conversations during those first few days was impersonal chit-chat—the weather, clothes, the shops in Paris. We were polite to each other, two disinterested strangers. But that all changed abruptly one afternoon. I had been in the library reading when looking up suddenly I saw Kyle standing above me. I had not heard him come in. He must have stolen through the door and across the carpet like a thief. There was no way I could get to my feet and leave with his heavy figure barring the way.

"So there you are," he said, smiling.

"I was just going," I said, closing my book.

"Not speaking to me, eh?"

"I haven't anything to say."

With a sudden movement he grabbed my arms and pulled me to my feet, the book falling to the floor. "You don't have to talk." He crushed me to him, his mouth sticky-moist and



warm came down on mine, a loathsome mouth that sickened and angered me. I beat against him with my fists. He held me all the tighter, squeezing the breath from my lungs. I felt as if I were going down, drowning in a horrible quagmire.

"Kyle. . . !"

My release was so sudden as Kyle broke away I nearly toppled over. Shirley was standing at the door of the library, her brassy hair a nimbus around her red angered face. For a moment no one spoke and then Kyle coolly walked across the room to meet his wife. "Fun and games," he said. She followed him through the door slamming it behind her.

My knees still trembling, I picked up the book and sat down in the chair. I was glad Shirley had seen us. I could well imagine that Kyle was now receiving the lecture of his life and that he would think twice before he touched me again. Shirley must have come upon many a similar scene in the years she had been married to Kyle. I did not envy her.

I was still sitting on the chair when Shirley returned. If I had thought she had come to make apologies for her husband, the notion was dispelled at once. "I'll thank you to keep away from Kyle," she said in a furious voice.

"Me?" I asked, bewildered.

"Yes, you. You don't fool me one bit with your prissy ways."

I gripped the arms of the chair. "I wouldn't have your husband on a golden platter," I said.

"Well, aren't you the phony snob," she sneered.

That insane twist to her logic rendered me speechless.

"You and your mother both. Always putting on the ritz, like you were the Astors or somebody."

"That's . . . that's not true. . . ."

"Not true? Rachel couldn't give me the time of day. Living in this crummy ruin because it once belonged to a marquis." She pronounced it "marqueezez." "Treating us worse than the servants. Always trying to break up Kyle and Phillipe. Making passes at him and then saying it was Kyle's fault. Just like you."

"Why . . . you . . . you're out of your mind!"

"Why don't you go back where you came from?" She leaned over and I could see the dark roots of her hair at the part. "We get along fine without Rachel, without you. Just pack your things. . . ."

The door opened and she jerked her body up. It was Phillipe. Neither of us spoke.

"Anything wrong?" Phillipe asked, looking from Shirley to me.

"No . . ." said Shirley, her voice smooth as butter. "Everything's fine. I was just asking Laura if I could fix her a drink." She strolled over to the bar. "How's about you, Phillipe?"

"None for me," said Phillipe, picking up a newspaper and sitting down.

"Or me," I chimed in.

Across the length of the room I could see the glare in Shirley's yellow eyes as they met mine, a cat's eyes full of murderous hate.



## CHAPTER VI

After my ugly encounter with Shirley my immediate impulse was to rush upstairs, pack my bags and leave. It would have been the sensible thing to do. My presence wasn't needed or wanted. Cosette had urged me to return to Paris for my own well being. Armand had said, "Go back. . . ." Marlyn resented me, Kyle was repellent and Shirley had literally ordered me out of my own home.

This last was where the rub came. The more I thought of Shirley, that brassy hair and her face red with rage, the angrier I became. I would not give her the satisfaction of tucking my tail between my legs and skulking off like a whipped dog. The fact that she frightened me made my determination all the stronger. I would leave—yes—but in my own good time.

There were two other reasons why I felt I could not go at once. One was Phillipe's request that I sort through my mother's things, taking what I wished to keep, and boxing the rest so that Cosette could dispose of them. I knew that I wanted none of Rachel's clothes, not even her furs or the black chiffon gown she had saved these many years. But there were a few trinkets, a few keepsakes—a ring, some photographs—I thought I might like to have. I had not been back to her room since that first night. The idea of having to come face to face with her intimate possessions again was a

painful one and I had been postponing that task from day to day.

The other reason was Armand. I tried to tell myself that I was not to blame if he chose to cling to his attitude of having been cruelly wronged. But my guilt, however much my mind might rationalize it as unfounded, was hard to banish. Although I had been rebuffed by him twice, I still had the hope that I might reach him, that we could part friends.

I decided to give myself two more days, one day to pick out what I wanted of my mother's things, the other to spend with Armand, if possible.

But something happened which disrupted that plan and delayed my departure. In the late afternoon my uncle, Barry Scofield, telephoned from Boston. Phillipe had gone upstairs to work in the studio and I took the call. Barry wasn't at all surprised to hear my voice.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to come to the funeral," he apologized.

I told him that I had not attended either, and why.

"I just now got back from a trial in Poughkeepsie, a real rough one, and I haven't had much time to call before this. I wondered if you and Phillipe would come down and have lunch with me tomorrow."

"I'd love to, Barry. I don't know about Phillipe, though."

"It's important," said Barry. "I'd come up there but I'm rushed off my feet right now."

"Something to do with Mother's money?" I asked.

"No . . . no. I can't tell you over the phone. Do you think you could persuade Phillipe?"

"I'll do my best," I said.

As it turned out Phillipe needed no persuasion and we arrived in Boston a little after one the following day. Barry, looking younger than his years, greeted us warmly. I had always liked Barry, a slim, pleasant looking man with lively blue eyes that crinkled at the corners when he smiled. Armand and I had enjoyed his infrequent visits to Storm

House. He was not like most of the other guests, patronizing and artificially polite, but genuinely interested in us children, more like an older friend.

We lunched at a small restaurant, an expensive one with a modest plaque on the door, dimmed lighting and discreetly attentive waiters. I ordered a cheese souffle, I remember, very airy and delicious. Barry talked about his trial in Poughkeepsie, a murder trial. He was a witty raconteur, and I might have enjoyed the meal, my first away from the gloom of Storm House in a week, if it had not been for my curiosity, a curiosity tinged with a strange apprehensiveness. Barry would not have had us come all that distance simply for a good lunch and some conversation. "It's important," he had said. I wondered why he didn't get to it, and if Phillippe was also suffering from impatience. I stole a glance at him. He had hardly touched his food, but was sitting in rapt attention, chin in hand, listening to Barry. It was not until we were through and the waiter had cleared our plates and had refilled our coffee cups that Barry brought up the reason for our meeting.

"I know that Rachel's death is not a pleasant subject," he began in a sober tone. "But there is something about it that puzzles me."

"Puzzles you?" asked Phillippe.

"It's hard for me to believe she committed suicide," he said.

"It was for all of us," Phillippe stirred his coffee, his eyes turned pensive.

"She was a strong woman with plenty of bounce," Barry said. "I remember how well she took my brother's sudden death. She'd only been married eighteen months and had a small baby."

"She was twenty-two then," said Phillippe. "Maybe that was part of it."

"Yes, that's true. And I suppose that even strong people have their breaking point. At least that is what I told myself



until . . . " He paused and began searching in his pockets.

Phillipe and I both watched him. "Until what?" I asked, sitting forward in my chair.

Barry drew out a letter. "Until yesterday. Yesterday was the first chance I had to go through my accumulated mail. And I found this." He handed it to Phillipe. "My secretary overlooked sending it on to me." I recognized the creamy white envelope, the writing on it, thick, decisive writing, my mother's.

"She must have written it the day she died," said Barry.

Phillipe took the letter out of the envelope, a single page. He put on his glasses and read it, the frown between his eyes growing deeper. Then he silently handed it to me.

*I've tried to reach you, it read, but they told me you were out of town on a case. There is something I must speak to you about. Do you think you can spare me a few minutes Wednesday evening? Please let me know. It's terribly urgent. Rachel.*

I looked at Phillipe and he looked at me. "I don't understand," said Phillipe, bewildered. "I don't understand it at all."

"I can't either," I said. "It . . . it doesn't seem like a letter Rachel would write if . . . if she were going to take her own life."

"Precisely," said Barry, reaching for the letter. "That's just what I thought."

"What could she have meant?" said Phillipe. "Do you have any idea what she meant?"

"No," said Barry. "I thought you might be able to help me."

Phillipe stared at the tablecloth, numb and stricken. There were only two other diners left in the restaurant, an elderly pair of women. Their voices reached us as a murmur. "What was she thinking of?" Phillipe asked. "Why couldn't she come to me, if there was something so terribly urgent. Why didn't she tell me?"

I put my hand over Phillipe's. "Maybe it was something

about her money." He shook his head. "She might have wanted to talk to Barry about a legal matter, her will."

"I doubt that," said Barry. "We'd discussed her will thoroughly when all that nasty business broke." He made little circles on the cloth with his coffee spoon. "Do you think Rachel could have slipped, lost her balance?"

"That's what I had thought at first, as I told Laura. And when Sheriff Cook came over. . . ."

"Sheriff Cook?" I asked surprised.

Barry answered, "The authorities are always notified in cases of suicide."

"We talked about it," Phillipe continued. "Rachel was not an accident prone person. She knew the Island well. She must have walked to Cliff's Edge a thousand times. Still . . . you know . . . but, as Sheriff Cook pointed out there was the note. . . ."

"Did Rachel have any enemies, Phillipe, someone who might have threatened her?" Barry interrupted.

Phillipe looked at him, a puzzled expression in his eyes. "I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"It occurred to me when I was reading that letter that perhaps Rachel did not jump off Cliff's Edge, but . . ." he paused, looking from Phillipe to me, ". . . but was pushed."

There was a shocked silence. "You mean . . . on purpose?" I asked in a tight voice. The other word, the word *murder*, the word I could not say, hung in the air.

"It is a possibility," said Barry.

"Why? Who?" Phillipe asked. I had the terrible feeling that in another moment I would cry.

"Someone who disliked her enough to wish her dead," said Barry.

"That's an awful thing to say," said Phillipe. "She was a wonderful woman. I . . . I . . ." He struggled for composure.

"She was an outspoken person and I . . . I guess that doesn't make for universal popularity." He shook his head again.

"But for the life of me I can't think of one single acquaintance, one friend who threatened her, certainly not with

bodily harm. Rachel would have told me. Rachel and I had no secrets . . . " he looked at Barry appealingly. " . . . or at least I didn't think so."

"Is it possible for someone to get on the Island without being seen?" Barry asked.

"During the day it is, I suppose. Someone could make it over and hide their boat along the beach. But at night we have the dogs. They're unchained at dusk."

"Dogs?"

Phillipe explained.

"She might have surprised a burglar," Barry said.

"At Cliff's Edge?" I put in. "It's not anywhere near the house."

The waiter came by with the glass coffee pot. We all three shook our heads and he left us. "Unless it wasn't a burglar," Barry said. "Could she have been blackmailed?"

Phillipe raised his brows. "Rachel? Hardly."

"Maybe someone who was angry, who got into a fight with her, pushed her," I ventured. I was thinking of Shirley and Marlyn.

"A servant?" Barry said.

"There were only Cosette and Marlyn by then, and the boy who does the gardening. Bob," said Phillipe. "There's no need to tell you that Cosette would lay down her life for Rachel. Bob's simple, and as for Marlyn, well, she's a rather immature girl who developed an adolescent crush on me. Rachel thought it amusing. She had no animosity toward the girl. Marlyn's silly, but a placid type really. I've never seen her angry."

Naturally he wouldn't, I thought. She was all smiles with Phillipe, butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. But I had seen her angry, angry and cunning.

"Who else was at the house?" Barry asked.

"Kyle and Shirley Brennan. My agent and his wife," Phillipe answered. "They did not have what you would call an intimate relationship with Rachel but they liked and respected her."



How could Phillipe be so blind? Kyle thought she was a prude and Shirley hated her.

" . . . and there was Armand."

"Armand?" Barry asked in surprise. "I thought he'd disappeared years ago."

"We thought so, too. But he came back. Showed up one day at the door with a bedroll and knapsack on his back. Said he was broke, needed a place to stay. He's become a drifter, I'm afraid. 'Dropping out of society' is what they call it now." His lip curled. "In my day it was just plain bum. . . ."

I suddenly felt myself going very hot. Phillipe could be indulgent, so uncritical of Kyle, Shirley, Marlyn, everybody, but never, *never* of Armand.

" . . . now there's a fellow with an ugly temper," Phillipe was saying. "Flies off. . . ."

"Armand is no such thing," I heard myself say. Barry and Phillipe looked up at me. "You are not suggesting that Armand . . . Armand. . . ."

"Nobody is suggesting anything," said Barry quietly.

The waiter with the coffee pot paused again at our table. "Is everything all right?" he asked. "Fine," said Barry. The two elderly ladies had gone. We were the only ones left and the bus boys, with a rattle of cutlery, were setting the tables for dinner.

"Of course," said Barry, "in all this theorizing we have almost forgotten the note Rachel left. Do you remember what it said, Phillipe?"

"I don't think I will ever forget it." Phillipe repeated Rachel's last written words.

"Hmnam." Barry drummed his fingers on the table. "I wonder . . . I wonder if she wanted to tell me that she was contemplating suicide."

"Tell *you*?" Phillipe asked in surprise.

"It's not as illogical as it seems. Many potential suicides inform people of their intent beforehand. The belief that people who threaten suicide never carry through is a myth.

The fact is that they are asking for help, shouting for it. Most of them have the subconscious hope that they'll be rescued at the last moment. Maybe that's why Rachel wrote me a letter."

"Why on earth should she tell you and not me? Or Co-sette?"

"Maybe she did. Not in so many words, but in a round-about way. A little hint or two. . . ."

Phillipe shook his head. "She seemed better on Tuesday. That's what I told Laura."

"Are you sure?"

He thought for a moment. "After . . . afterwards I believed it was because she had come to a decision and she didn't want me to guess. But now. . . . I remember she did wake up crying. I had stayed the night with her. She apologized for being a 'nuisance.' Rachel a nuisance! She said . . . she said that I'd be better off without her." He looked from Barry to me. "Then at breakfast she seemed okay. She had an egg . . . she. . . ." There was pain, such naked suffering in his eyes, I flinched. "I had no idea, no idea what she really meant."

"Of course, you didn't," said Barry. "It's the classic remark of a weeping wife. She wanted reassurance."

Rachel weeping. Rachel a weeping wife who wanted reassurance. Once more I had the strange feeling that Phillipe was speaking of an acquaintance, not someone I knew. It was a picture I could not get through my head. I had never seen my mother cry. Never.

"I should have known," said Phillipe, staring into space. "I should have known. It's all my fault."

I felt drawn into his remorse. In some way I felt I should have known too. I tried to recall the exact wording of her last letter to me. It had been full of Phillipe's Boston exhibit. Not a word about herself, no mention of a fortune gone, the servants dismissed. No hint of depression, of melancholy. Surely there must have been something, a phrase, a sentence that might have given me a clue?

"There's no use in going on with this," said Barry. "Second guessing. I'm sorry I had to rake the whole thing over again. But the letter . . . I thought it only fair. . . ."

"Yes," said Phillipe. "You did the right thing. I'm glad you told me about it. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way."

Barry began to talk of his partner, Peterson, the one who had defrauded my mother. I caught the words, "Brazil . . . they think he's got to Belam . . . hopeless trying to trace him. . . ."

His voice faded into the background of clinking water glasses. My mind kept going over and over Rachel's letter. *I have something to tell you.* Had it been the cry of a woman at rope's end, a woman in despair who wanted, yet was afraid of taking her own life? Again I could not fit that image into Mother's. I seemed to see her face in my mind. Those thick brows, the clear eyes, the pronounced jaw. I saw her standing on the precipice at Cliff's Edge, tall and straight, the wind loosening a tendril of hair, her eyes staring down at the jagged rocks. Had she jumped?

Or had someone crept up behind her, someone with hate filled eyes, someone lifting strong, determined hands, catching her unawares in the small of the back, propelling her into space and to certain death below?



## CHAPTER VII

Phillipe and I rode silently through the Boston streets, Phillipe's face ashen in the gray light of the passing afternoon. He looked ill, old and tired. I almost wished that Barry had said nothing about Mother's letter. Reading it, discussing the whys and wherefores of those hastily penned words had served no purpose as far as I could see, except to revive Phillipe's guilt, the self-blame with which he had lashed himself since Mother had died. I wanted to say something, to comfort him, but I could think of nothing. It had all been said. "Don't blame yourself," "No one could have prevented it," "It wasn't your fault," the little handy phrases that smoothed the surface but could not touch the agony beneath.

We were on the turnpike headed north when Phillipe spoke. "Laura . . . I'm wondering if I shouldn't talk to Sheriff Cook, anyway. About that letter. What do you think?"

"No," I said firmly. "No, let's leave it. We went through it all at lunch. Barry is an expert in those things. If he had any doubts he would have suggested calling in the sheriff."

"You feel that way?"

"I do." I did not want to tell him about the silent questions, the insidious speculations which had gone through my mind during our talk. What would it accomplish? It would only make bad feelings all around. If I had revealed Marlyn's,

Shirley's or Kyle's hostility toward Rachel there would certainly be ugly confrontations, arguments. A whole nest of accusations and denials would be stirred up, and I did not want to cast myself in the role of troublemaker. Because these people had not liked Rachel did not mean they—or anyone—had murdered her.

When we finally reached the Island, night had fallen under a storm-threatening sky. All through dinner I could hear the distant mutter of thunder. In the heavy, oppressive, atmosphere we spoke in low tones as if the sibilance of our voices might disturb the moist laden air and release the pent up storm upon our heads. After we had finished our meal I asked Cosette if she would come upstairs with me and help go through my mother's clothes. It was not that I needed her assistance but somehow I could not face going into Rachel's room alone. She agreed, reluctantly, I thought, and I wondered what memories she carried, whether she, too, felt partly responsible for not having read the signs of Rachel's impending self-destruction.

Nothing had been touched since that first night of my return. Phillipe had no reason to, and the maids who routinely cleaned each morning had long since departed. Through a quirk of architecture the wash and ebb of the sea had always been louder in Rachel's room than elsewhere in the house, and now with the storm coming on, the waves seemed to be crashing at the very windows.

"It's hard to believe she's gone," said Cosette, setting down one of the boxes we had carried up. She stood looking around. "It seems like only yesterday she was sitting there at the dressing table, asking me if I minded doing the cooking 'until things got better.' Better. . . . I wonder how she feels about it now."

"It's over for her, Cosette. At least that much is over."

"Over?" She gave me an odd look. "I don't think so. Not for Rachel."

I knew that her religion promised purgatory to suicides, but I had no wish to get entangled in a theological argument,

so I went over to the wardrobe. "I think I'll start here," I said.

"What do you want me to do?" Cosette asked.

"Nothing. Just sit and keep me company." I smiled at her. She sat down on the stool at the dressing table.

I began to slip the plastic covered dresses one by one off the hangers, folding each neatly and packing them in a box.

"Are there any of these you would like to have?" The furs, I had told Phillipe earlier, would go to Barry's daughter.

"No," she said. And then, "I wonder if Marlyn might have a few of these. She's not got much, you know."

"Why . . ." I hesitated. The thought of Marlyn wearing a dress or blouse that had belonged to my mother seemed an insult to her memory. "Do you think they would fit her? Mother, I'm sure, wore a larger size."

"She could take in the seams," Cosette suggested.

There was no decent way to refuse her request. "It's all right with me. She can go through the boxes later and pick out whatever she wants," I said, trying to give a generosity to my words I was far from feeling. "But . . . but if she does take anything would you . . . would you ask her not to wear it while I'm here?"

Cosette nodded. "I'll do that."

I went about my work with a hurried nervousness. I wanted to finish, to be done with what now seemed a ghoulish task. Cosette must have felt uneasy, too, for she had gotten up from the stool and was wandering about the room, from the bed to the desk to the dressing table, coming to peer over my shoulder at the wardrobe.

All the while the thunder grew louder and nearer. One box was filled and I was starting on the other when the thunder began to crackle and explode directly overhead.

"The storm's broken," said Cosette, and just as she spoke a window flew open, billowing the draperies in a blast of driven rain. I hurried to it. The hinges had come loose and instead of the window opening inward it had gone outward. I



leaned across the sill to catch the frame as it banged against the shutter. The wet wind caught me in its fury, beating at my face, clawing at my hair, sucking the breath from my lungs. The crazy lightning zigzagged and danced over the stone outcroppings of the walls, on the rocks and the angry foaming sea below. It was a wild night, as wild as any I had seen.

The window kept slipping from my grasp and finally, having managed to catch the bottom frame, it stubbornly refused to come to. I tugged and tugged at it, straining into the screaming wind.

Suddenly I had the weird sensation that my feet were no longer solidly planted on the floor. I had become suspended in time, in space, and the room behind me, the wardrobe, Cosette, reality itself had disappeared, leaving the demon storm and me alone engaged in a life and death struggle. A diabolical evil seemed to ride the night wind, a raging force determined to drag me into its grinding maw. I found myself clinging to the window, dizzy with the roar of the sea, fighting, fighting with every ounce of strength.

I do not know how long the illusion lasted, a moment, perhaps thirty seconds, and then there was a slight lull and I swung the window toward me. I closed it, fastening it tightly.

When I turned back Cosette was standing in the middle of the room hugging her arms. "It's cold in here," she said. "It's suddenly become terribly cold."

"The window . . . the window was open," I said. I went to the bathroom and patted my wet face and hair dry with a towel. I noticed my hands were shaking. My face in the mirror looked strangely white. Was it some kind of psychic experience I had gone through at the window? No, I told myself, I wasn't the least bit psychic. I ought to leave that kind of thing for Cosette. The wind and the height had made me dizzy. Nothing more.

I had started packing the third box when the lights flickered. "What now?" I groaned.

"It's the generator," said Cosette. "It's been acting up lately. Phillipe was planning to have a new one put in this winter."

"Do you suppose the storm has thrown an extra load on it?" The electrical workings of Storm House had always been a mystery to me.

"No. I don't see how."

I had cleared the rest of the dresses and blouses from the hangers and had started on the second half of the wardrobe when Cosette said, "Couldn't . . . couldn't we finish up tomorrow?" Her voice was tremulous, unfamiliar.

I turned to look at her. Her face under the overhead light had gone gray. "What is it?" I asked. "Aren't you well?"

She had been sitting on the stool again and now she got to her feet. "It's the room," she said unsteadily. "It's . . . it's . . . she's here."

"Who is here?"

"Rachel. Rachel is here!" she whispered.

We stared at each other for the space of five seconds. I could feel the cold dread sweeping up from my ankles. Nothing that had happened so far frightened me more than the sight of Cosette, a Cosette who never flinched at the sight of blood, pain or disaster, now waxy of face and quivering. "Of course she is," I answered in a light, careless voice, a voice that would not have fooled a child. "This room . . ." my hand made a sweeping motion, ". . . was hers. Everything in it. . . ."

"No," said Cosette. "Can't you *feel* it? The cold, the terrible cold of the grave. She's come back. She's here in this room, watching us."

"Cosette. . . ."

The lights went out. Suddenly and without warning. The darkness was streaked with flashes of lightning playing along the draperies. A peal of thunder exploded, shaking the walls, echoing, receding. The cold Cosette had complained of swirled around me, intense, biting to the bone. "Candles," I said.

"They're on the mantel," Cosette said. "I . . . I can't . . . could you get them?"

But I could not move either. I seemed rooted, grown to the spot there beside the wardrobe just as I had been at the window.

"She did not die a natural death," Cosette's voice was hoarse. "Those are the ones who come back . . . come back from the grave. They don't stay buried, they don't. . . ."

"Cosette!" My voice was desperate with fear. "Please. . . !" The thunder crashed and I put my hands to my ears.

A bony hand, cold as ice, grasped my wrist. A scream rose in my throat—and died when I saw, in a throb of lighting, that the hand was Cosette's. In the weird shimmer of light her face was a waxen mask.

"Let's leave," I said. "You were right. We can finish up tomorrow."

But she held on to my wrist with an iron grip. "Look!" she exclaimed.

"Where? What?"

"There by the window," she whispered in my ear.

The curtains were moving, rippling in the draft, as if stirred by a ghostly hand. The light shimmered behind them.

"I don't see anything," My words were a whisper, too. "There's nothing there."

"Don't you see *her*?" Cosette breathed in my ear. "She's wearing the long brocade, her favorite dress, the one she was buried in."

"No . . . no. . . ."

A blinding white flash lit up the room. And there outlined against the curtains was the figure of a woman in profile, tall, poised, the coronet of hair, the straight imperious nose.

"Rachel!" Cosette screamed.

Panic swallowed me in one horrendous gulp and my heart seemed to splinter into a thousand shards. And then darkness. "No . . . no. . . ." I turned and started to the door, stumbling, my shins catching the sharp edge of a box. My arms went out to keep myself from falling and I found that I



was grappling with something soft and pliant, something evil, malevolent. "No. . . ." A whimper in my throat. I could not thrust it from me. It clung to my face, my hair, enfolding me in the dark and terrible wings of black terror.

Suddenly the lights went on. The transition from dark to light was so swift it stunned me. I swept the soft thing from my head and shoulders. A robe, a silk robe. I had walked half fallen into the wardrobe and become entangled in one of my mother's robes. A hysterical sob escaped my lips as I turned to Cosette with a foolish look upon my face.

She was not there.

Gone. Vanished like Rachel's ghost.

My hand went to my throat. "Cosette. . . ." I took a few steps forward.

She was lying on the floor just beyond the boxes, a crumpled heap of gray. I knelt beside her. Her blue veined eyelids were shut in a bloodless face and for a moment I thought she was dead. But I saw a tiny pulse beating faintly in her throat. She had only fainted. She must have fallen when I had turned to run from the room.

I began to chafe her wrists and her icy hands. When her eyes fluttered open, I ran to the bathroom and got a glass of water. I cradled her head in my lap and pressed the glass to her lips. Her eyes were shifting to and fro in a dazed, stunned way. "Drink some of this," I commanded. She sipped at the water, her teeth scraping the glass.

"I . . . forgive me," she said, rolling her eyes upward to meet mine.

"It's all right," I said. "Do you want to lie here for awhile? I can get you a pillow."

"Is she gone?" she asked, ignoring my question.

"Yes . . . yes. . . ."

"You saw her then?" She raised herself to a sitting position and faced me, her eyes burning into mine. "You saw her?"

"Here let me help you to your feet."

"No . . . wait. Answer my question." Her voice was still thick with fear.

"I . . . I think so . . . I don't know. It was hard to tell . . . the lightning . . . the curtains, the shadows, *could* have made a kind of pattern, something that looked like a woman."

"You saw Rachel," she said. "You saw her just as I did."

I said nothing. My mind turning inward pictured the lightning flooding the room again, the curtains billowing. I saw the outline, the familiar shoulders, the slope of the neck under the heavy hair. Had it been Rachel's ghost or had my terrified brain, saturated with Cosette's own fear, her insistent suggestion, conjured up a vision of my dead mother?

"It was only the lightning," I said.

"No. She was here." She took my arm and brought her face close, looking into my eyes. Her own were feverish, as if she were ill. I could feel the tremor of her body in her touch.

"You know what that means, don't you?" she asked.

"No," I said, my mouth gone dry. "No."

"The dead only come back when they have died a violent death," she repeated.

"She committed suicide. Is that what you mean?"

"No. For that she would have to stand judgment before God. I never wanted to believe Rachel took her own life. Never really believed it. And now I'm sure." She bent even closer. I could see a fine line of hair above her mouth. "Rachel did not cast herself into the sea. Someone threw her there. She was murdered."

## CHAPTER VIII

We left the room, the half packed boxes, the tumbled clothes in the wardrobe and went down to the kitchen for a cup of hot, strong tea. By the time the kettle had boiled and the tea was brewed I could see that Cosette had regained her composure. The color had returned to her face and her hands were steady as she poured us each a cup.

I waited until she was seated. "Are you feeling better?" I asked.

"Yes. I'm all right now." She reached for the sugar.

"Cosette . . ." I said, watching her carefully. "what did you mean upstairs when you said that my mother was murdered?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I was frightened."

"Do you know something. . . ?"

"No, I don't know anything." Her voice was firm. "What should I know? It's just that I don't want to believe she killed herself. I . . . it's hard for me to accept that."

"But you sounded so positive," I protested.

"Did I? I never fainted before in my life. Maybe I did."

"Do you believe Rachel was murdered?"

She did not answer. Her spoon went round and round in the cup making a slow whirlpool.

"I know you don't like to talk about it," I said. "But you can't blame me for wanting to know. And you did say. . . ."

"I was out of my mind. I didn't know what I was saying."



To take one's life is a mortal sin. Of course, I'd rather believe someone else did it."

"Who. . . ?"

"No one." She looked directly at me. "No one. That's the whole point. No one." She drank her tea in small sips, pursing her lips.

"Mother wrote a letter to Uncle Barry before she died," I said. I told her what the letter had said. "Do you have any idea what she wanted to see him about?"

She shook her head. "None." She got up and brought out a plate of cookies.

I helped myself to one. "Tell me about Rachel's last day, Cosette. What kind of mood was she in, how did she behave?"

"She seemed like she was finally coming out of the blues. She ate a little something at lunch. She had gotten awfully thin. Would hardly touch her food for the longest time. And I . . . I was glad to see her eating, even though it was only a cup of chowder. I didn't see her again until around five. She came into the kitchen and said she was going for a walk. I said, 'It's chilly out. Will you be warm enough?' She was wearing her brown suede jacket. 'I think so,' she said. 'I won't be long.' And that was the last . . . the last words she spoke to me."

I munched slowly on the cookie. "Did you know how Marlyn felt about Rachel?" I suddenly asked.

Her eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

I told her then about my encounter with Marlyn the night I had seen her outside Phillipe's door.

Cosette's face turned a fiery red. "I'm going to have to speak to that girl," she said, her lips drawn in a line.

"You don't think she could have gotten angry enough to. . . ."

"No." She cut me off sharply.

"She might have gotten it into her head that if Phillipe was a widower. . . ."

"No!"

I stared at her for a long moment. Again it seemed to me that she was acting unusually defensive about Marlyn and it puzzled me.

"If Marlyn talked disrespectful of your mother," Cosette said, "she was fresh—smart-alecky. Like Armand." This last with a meaningful look.

It was my turn to be defensive. "Armand had good reason . . . to . . . to be smart-alecky, as you call it. He was humiliated, made to feel worthless."

"They took him in. They did their best for him." She tipped her head and drained the tea cup. "And they took him back."

"Mother had no objections?"

"Oh . . . she was scornful. You know how she felt about people, especially young people who have no purpose in life."

"Did . . . did. . . ." I hated to ask the question, but it had been on my mind ever since our talk with Barry. "Did Mother and Armand quarrel . . . before she died?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact they did. It wasn't anything new, though, except this was a big one. I could hear them shouting."

"What were they fighting about?"

"I have no idea. The one thing I don't do is listen at keyholes. I discovered long ago, the less you know what's going on, the better off you are."

I got up and emptied the last of my tea in the sink. I rinsed the cup under the tap. "They were probably arguing about me," I said.

"Could be."

I turned. "There's one thing you must try to understand. Armand did not like Rachel. But he would never . . . never. . . ."

Her eyebrows lifted. "Who said he would?"

We left the subject there, and a few minutes later I went up to bed.

By morning the rain had stopped and after breakfast I set out for Fisherman's Cove where Cosette said that Armand had gone earlier. The Cove was on the lee side of the Island, a good two miles from the house. We had not gone there much as children because, as I have said, the Cove's people were unfriendly. Their aloofness, as I remembered Phillipe once telling us, was due to a dispute between the fishermen and his father, the men claiming squatter's rights and Phillipe's father insisting that the property belonged legally and exclusively to the Tourands. He had never succeeded in evicting them and when he died, Phillipe, easy going and more tolerant, let the whole matter die. Still the bitter words, the court suits were not forgotten and the fishermen would have nothing to do with us who lived at the house. In the end, however, they moved of their own accord—for whatever reason we never knew—and their small cottages had stood empty for the past ten years.

There were two paths to the Cove, a shorter one going through the wood and another crossing a rock strewn meadow, meandering over dunes of decomposed granite to the shore where it followed the high cliff to the Cove. I chose the latter. I was in no particular hurry to see Armand and I wanted time to think about what I was going to say to him. I had been walking for perhaps fifteen minutes when I rounded the point where the Cove came into view a half mile away. The small cluster of huts, eight in all, some on stilts, some clinging to the side of the hill, huddled together along the rim of the pebbled beach. It was too far for me to see whether the *Caravelle* or Armand were there at the pier.

As I stood there I heard the sound of barking. Looking over my shoulder I saw two dogs, the mastiffs which guarded Storm House at night, racing down from a distant dune. Somehow they had gotten loose. I watched them for perhaps half a minute, then turned and quickened my pace. I had no wish to meet up with those vicious animals again. As I hurried along I could tell they were getting closer and



closer. Their baying, yipping bark was now distinct and sharp. The sound of it bristled the hairs on the back of my neck.

I swiveled my head around. They were some fifty yards behind bounding along the path, heading straight for me!

For a moment I stared in disbelief and then I turned and began to run in the direction of the Cove where I could find shelter. Fear gave wings to my feet. I ran, my coat flapping at my knees, my hair flying in the wind. The path was stony and slippery from the night's rain. Once I stumbled, twice I skidded. I left the path and hurtled down the sandy slope to the beach, kicking my shoes off as I went.

They were right behind. It seemed that I could smell their hot, sour breaths, feel the nip of their slavering teeth in the calves of my legs. I raced along the hard packed line of the outgoing tide, my legs pumping, the wind whistling in my ears, my lungs constricted with fire. "Armand. . . ! Armand. . . !" Precious breath, a shout for help. The first hut was near, so tantalizingly close.

I wasn't going to make it.

I began to unbutton my raincoat as I ran, slipping out of it. The dogs were at my heels now. I whipped about hurling the coat at their snarling faces. Without pausing to see what happened I wheeled and ran, skipping through the shallow foaming breakers into the sea. They were barking wildly now, triumphantly as they came bounding into the water after me. The raincoat had only given me a handful of seconds. I plunged into the next wave, the icy shock knocking what was left of my breath from my throat. Instinctively I inhaled, keeping my mouth closed as I went under. I began to swim out, out and away from those scissor-like jaws. I swam until my arms and legs were numb weights, my sodden clothes dragging at my arms and legs like nets of seaweed. The cold was terrible. It sucked the very marrow from my bones.

My strokes were getting feebler and feebler. I began to swallow water as I went under. I fought, coughing and splut-

tering to the surface and rolled over on my back. I lay there floating, staring up at the sky, an infinitely cold and cruel expanse of gray. I wondered if the dogs had followed me. I did not think they would. I had known even labradors and spaniels, water loving dogs, who had been intimidated by the waves. I lifted my head and, treading water, looked toward the shore. I had not come as far as I thought. I could see the dogs and there was a man with them. The man I recognized as Kyle. I waved my arm but he had his back to me. He was chaining the dogs together.

I let the next large roller catch me and it carried me shoreward. Kyle ran out to meet me. "What happened?" he asked as he helped me up.

"The . . . dddogs . . ." I said, through chattering teeth. ". . . they . . . they g . . . got loose." I was shivering and shaking so I could not continue. The dogs had been fastened, I saw, to a rusting post sticking out of the sand.

"Here," he said, taking off his jacket. He threw it about my shoulders. "You'll have to get out of those wet things or you'll freeze to death."

"No. . . ." I said, a sudden vision of myself naked before his eyes.

"If you don't freeze, you'll catch pneumonia. Come along." He put his arm about my shoulders. "I'll build a fire in the hut and you can stay there while I go back to the house and get you a change."

"No. . . ." It was a very weak "no." I felt that I could scarcely make it to the hut let alone back to the house.

"All right, I'll send Marlyn back, then. You can't stand here all day and argue."

I had to lean on him as he led me to the hut. I was drained of strength, so miserable with cold. The hut's large room was empty except for a few rotting produce crates, a soiled mattress in the corner and an iron pot-bellied stove. The air was strong with the smell of mildew and decomposed fish. Kyle broke up one of the crates, cracking the boards across his knees and throwing them into the stove. I watched him from



the door. "What are you doing on this side of the Island, anyway?" he said.

"I was looking for Armand," I answered, suddenly remembering. The thought that Armand was close by made me less apprehensive of Kyle. "Cosette said he was at the Cove."

"His boat's gone from the dock," Kyle said, turning to me. "He's probably sailed over to the mainland."

He must have seen the disappointment in my face, guessed at my uneasiness. "I won't touch you," he promised. "You don't have to stand at the door like a lost lamb."

I walked over to the grimy-paned window and looked out. I could see the wooden pier, the water lapping at the splintered pilings. The only boat moored there was a partially sunken dinghy. There was no sign of the *Caravelle*.

The fire was a long time catching, but Kyle kept nursing it along and finally a small drift of black smoke emerged from the stove's door. In another moment the boards caught with a satisfying crackle.

"I'd advise you to get out of those things right away," said Kyle, going to the door. "I'll hurry."

I stood in front of the stove, now heating the room with a surprising rapidity and pulled my clothes off, feeling the warmth slowly returning to my frozen body. I slipped on Kyle's jacket, which reached to my knees and pulled a crate up to the stove. Sitting there watching the orange flames eat through the wooden slats, I calculated that I had a wait of at least an hour.

Now that I was warm, I began to feel very sleepy, my eyelids drooping, my head swaying forward. I looked at the mattress in the corner, the tufts of dirty stuffing escaping from where it had been torn. I wanted desperately to go to it, to lie down, to close my eyes and sleep and sleep. It was probably full of vermin, I told myself. My head sank lower and lower. Suddenly I caught myself toppling forward. I gave up



and went over to the mattress, sinking down upon its musty, damp softness. Curled up in a tight ball, I let sleep overtake me.

I awoke to the touch of a hand on my shoulder. My startled eyes flew open to meet Kyle's, liquid with desire. I opened my mouth to scream and Kyle pressed the sound back with a large, hairy hand. "Marlyn couldn't get away," he said. He was kneeling beside me.

"You're lying," I said when he had taken his hand away.

"No, it's the truth," he said, pointing. "See, I brought your clothes."

I struggled to my knees and tried to get up, but he held me down. "Let me go!" I said in angry revulsion.

"Is that the thanks I get for saving your life?"

"Thank you," I said. "Now, please go."

"Some gratitude. C'mon you can do better than that." He pulled me toward him, his eyes reddened pinpoints in the semidark. My hand came up and hit him with every ounce of my renewed strength. He staggered back. Before he could recover I was on my feet running toward the door. He caught hold of the jacket sleeve, tearing it from me. I flung the door open and came face to face with Armand.

For the space of a few seconds all three of us stood frozen in a tableau, Kyle at my back with his hand on my empty sleeve, I, the jacket half pulled from my naked body, and Armand on the threshold. The first to move was Armand. It was a slight move, just the shifting of his eyes. They traveled over me and then to Kyle.

I drew the jacket together. "Armand . . ." I pleaded. I could not bear what I knew he must be thinking.

"We're having a party," said Kyle. "And you're not invited." He tried to pull me back.

"No. . . ! He's lying!" I exclaimed. "He's . . . I . . . had to run from the dogs . . . and . . . he was supposed . . . supposed to get my clothes. . . ." Panic, a fear that Armand might

believe Kyle twisted my tongue to incoherence.

"Run along, buster," Kyle said. "We don't want you here."

"The buster" was a mistake. Armand pushed me aside and drove his fist squarely into Kyle's jaw. It all happened in one swift movement. Kyle reeled, holding his jaw, a look of shock on his face. I felt sick. There was something degrading in that scene, my standing there in that short jacket, the soiled mattress behind me, and Armand having to hit Kyle.

"What did you call me?" asked Armand, his body tensed, his fists clenched at his sides. A small pulse was beating at the side of his mouth.

"Nothing," said Kyle rubbing his jaw. "Nothing." He gave me a venomous look. "I should have let the dogs have you." He went through the door, slamming it behind him. Armand stared at it for a long moment and then started to leave.

"Wait. . . ! Armand . . . please. . . ."

He turned, his dark face a mask. The only living thing in it were those eyes, black and filled with contempt.

"Please . . . let me explain."

He said nothing. I began to talk, the words at first slow and halting, then coming faster and faster, spilling out of me in a flood, telling him how the dogs had pursued me, how Kyle had found me and then gone back to the house for my clothes.

Armand listened, his expression never changing, his eyes glued to my face. "I . . . That's all," I finished. "I don't know how you could possibly think that Kyle and I . . ."

Still he remained silent. The fire in the stove caught a dry board and flared up, the reflected flame leaping in Armand's eyes. His silence was terrible. A condemnation, a denial, indifference? What? I could not tell. Why didn't he speak? It was like the gray empty sky I had looked up into an hour before. Merciless, I thought, uncaring.

Everything inside me seemed to crumple into misery. Misery for the day, my flight, Kyle's lascivious assault, Armand's implacability. It was all too much. I began to cry.



openly, unashamed. What did it matter? I was crying for all the things that had gone wrong. My mother's death, the uncertainties surrounding it, Shirley's and Marlyn's hostility, Cosette scaring me half to death.

I felt Armand touch my shoulder, his arm go around me as he drew me gently to him, where I went on crying against the rough wool of his sweater. "It's all right, Larry," he said. I had not been called Larry in eight long years. It was Armand's name for me. "It's going to be all right." His words set me off into another fit of painful sobbing. Finally I lifted my head and through a blur of tears saw the face that I once knew, the smile, the warm, tender sympathy in the eyes, the look that had been given to me and to me alone when I had hurt myself or had been scolded.

I knew then, as I knew the fingers of my hands, that Armand's face, that look had never left me. Unknown to myself, I had carried it around in my heart from Switzerland to France to the Cote de Azur to Venice to Algiers, and all the other strange and exotic places I had been. It was Armand's face which had stood between me and the others, George, Leon, Charles, the men who wanted to love or marry me, or both. All had been refused. I never really knew why—I had been fond of them—until this moment.

Armand was the reason. The Armand I had known. And however I might rationalize, explain, find excuses, Armand was the reason, too, for my staying on at Storm House, a place that had turned unfriendly, peopled with my enemies. Looking up at him, I felt that there was no problem I could not solve, no fear that I could not overcome. I wanted to keep that look forever.

But already the moment was passing, had passed with the shadow that moved across Armand's face. He stepped away from me. "You'd better get dressed," he said in a polite voice. "I'll walk you back, if you like."



## CHAPTER IX

I had only meant to tell Phillipe about the dogs, but somehow in the telling he must have sensed that Kyle's rescue had been a mixed blessing. He pressed me for details and before I knew it, the whole story was out. Phillipe was furious. The dogs, he said, would have to go. He did not know how they had managed to get loose, but he was not having them around the place, risking serious injury to someone for the sake of guarding a few antiques.

As for Kyle, he too would have to leave.

"The nerve of that man, the rotten nerve! He and Shirley can pack and get off the Island. The faster the better."

"No . . . no!" I protested in dismay, feeling more than ever like a petty tattler. "I don't want you to do that. He's been your friend for so long."

"That doesn't matter. There's absolutely no excuse for his behavior."

"Look—if you just talked to him. Tell him that I don't appreciate his advances. That will be enough. After all, I should be gone in a few days."

"I could lop his head off," said Phillipe. We had been sitting in his room and now he got up and began pacing up and down. "The devil! That man . . . I would have gotten rid of him years ago, but he knows the art world so well, the people, the contacts. . . ."

"Phillipe, I'd feel terrible if I were the cause of breaking up your friendship, your association."

"A fine friendship, a fine association."

"Just talk to him. That will be enough."

"That I'll certainly do."

I don't know what Phillipe said to Kyle, but he never touched me again. His eyes, though, whenever we happened to meet were eloquent with undisguised hate. And Shirley, having heard of the episode (Kyle's version, no doubt) berated me that evening when she found me alone in the library. "Hypocrite," she hissed at me. "Playing around with a married man. If it hadn't been for Armand. . . ." This time I did not demean myself by arguing with her, but turned my back and left the room.

A man came to get the dogs the next morning. I saw him from the kitchen window, a stocky man with a scarf wound around his neck, as he took them down to the dock, the huge beasts straining at their leashes. The thought struck me as I watched the man struggling to get them into the waiting boat that the dogs might have broken loose on the night my mother died and had attacked her, causing her to fall from Cliff's Edge. But later when I discussed it with Cosette, she said that no such thing had happened. Even if the dogs had been at large, they knew Rachel well, she said, as Rachel often fed them. In fact, Cosette added, when Phillipe had first brought the dogs to Tourand Island he had made a point of everyone getting acquainted with them as a precaution against their turning on a member of the household.

Later, out of curiosity, I strolled around to the back of the house where the dogs had been kept behind a chain link fence. Bob was cleaning out the kennels. A tall, thin boy of eighteen, he greeted me pleasantly by tugging at his cap. He had the large, vacant eyes of the not-too-bright, but when I asked him if he had been at the house when the dogs got loose, he answered intelligently enough. "No, m'am. Dad kept me at home to help with painting the barn. I heard about them dogs." He scratched his head with the bill of his

cap. "Ain't never happened before. Them getting away, I mean."

The dog chains were still there, as were the iron rings they had been fastened to. Kyle, I remembered, had tied the dogs up with their chains. If they had broken loose they must have done so from the iron loops. I bent down to examine them. There was no break. They had not been bent or damaged. "Were the dogs always fastened to these?" I asked.

"Yes'm, excepting when they was let out on the run twice a day."

The run went around in a circle on the inside of the fence. It was a high fence, at least six feet. "Do you suppose they could clear this fence?"

"Could. If they didn't get a big shock," he said, pointing to a small black box on the gate. The fence was electrically charged then, so even if the dogs had managed to work free of the loops they could not have jumped the fence.

Unless someone had turned the electricity off. Deliberately. On purpose. For I was the only one on the Island the dogs did not know. I was a stranger. It was strangers, any strangers, they had been taught to attack.

I stood there in the sunlight, the wind teasing my hair, stood there in the long shadow of the house and felt myself suddenly grow cold. I looked up at the stone walls, the demoniacal gargoyle over the large center arch, the multi-paned windows, blank raised eyes, and I had the eerie sensation that I was being watched. Behind one of those sightless glass eyes was a seeing, living one. Someone at that very moment knew where I was, what I was doing, guessed perhaps what I was saying. Dwarfed by the immensity of Storm House I felt like an animal in the meadow, a small helpless creature, a creature silently hunted.

It was not a rational fear. That's what I told myself over and over. Why should anyone want to frighten, to harm me? Shirley? She might be neurotically jealous, but she wasn't insane. Kyle? Marlyn? I did not think that my behavior toward



them, however antagonistic, was the kind to provoke violence.

Yet the feeling nagged at me whenever I met Marlyn's eyes, whenever I sat down to dinner with Shirley and Kyle. Had one of them something to do with my mother's death? If so my presence at Storm House, my closeness to Rachel and Phillipe, might make whoever it was uneasy and wary. I did not want to go to Phillipe with my fantasies. I had already been the cause, though not intentionally, of a near disruption to his association with Kyle. As for Cosette, she had firmly squashed the subject the night of the storm. "That's the whole point," she had said, "... no one."

In the end I decided to speak to Armand. He had returned to his old aloofness and I wasn't sure he would want to listen, but I could lose nothing by trying. So I got up very early the next morning and caught him as he was leaving the kitchen for the Cove.

"Do you mind if I walk with you?" I asked.

"I don't mind," he said. Those were the same words he had used so many years ago, when as a small boy he had finally chosen to accept me. It gave me courage.

It was a hazy, sunlit day, the first warm one in nearly a week, and the water taking color from the sky was a washed milky blue. Far out on the horizon a pair of white sails tacked to the wind. "How are you doing with the *Caravelle*?" I asked as an opener.

"Pretty good."

"Will you take me for a sail one of these days?" I asked.

"If you like."

Making conversation with him was not going to be as easy as I had thought. I swallowed and made the plunge. "What do you think of the Brennans?"

He looked rather surprised. "Kyle and Shirley? Why do you ask?"

"I . . . I just wondered."

"If you have any kind of memory—which I doubt—you already know that I never particularly liked either of them."

"Neither did Rachel," I said. "Did she?"

"She tolerated them, I guess. But then they weren't here much when she was alive."

He stopped and looked at me. We had come to a dip in the path bordered on each side by a jumble of rocks, as if a giant hand had dropped them haphazardly on the gritty, sand-like soil.

"Are you trying to tell me something?" he asked.

"Well . . . yes. It's nothing definite . . . just a feeling. I . . ." He kept staring at me, his eyes black, impenetrable like opaque glass. "I . . . I was wondering. . . ."

"Wondering what?"

I told him then how I suspected my mother might have been deliberately killed, how deeply the Brennans had disliked her, especially Shirley.

"You think Shirley is crazy? Homicidal?" he said, when I had finished.

"She could be," I said, sitting down on an upturned rock.

"She'd have to go around killing half the state, then," Armand said, looking down at me. "Kyle is a pretty notorious skirt chaser."

It was much the same thing I had told myself earlier.

"You think she's all bluster then?"

"I wouldn't say that. There's always the possibility of her, or anyone for that matter, going off half-cocked. She strikes me as an A-one neurotic. But . . ." he shrugged, ". . . so are a lot of people."

"Armand . . . I know it sounds silly, but I just have this strong feeling. . . ."

"That Rachel didn't jump?"

"Yes."

He did not say anything for a moment. His eyes in the shadow of the rock seemed to have darkened.

"You don't agree?" I asked.

"The verdict was suicide."

"There was a letter she wrote. . . ." I told him about it.

"It could have meant anything," he said. "I think you are

clutching at straws. You don't *want* to believe she fell apart the way she did. You know, even if she was your mother, you'll have to agree that she was a snob. And for her to suddenly find herself poor, like the rest of us peons, was a big comedown. She couldn't take it, Laura. You just have to accept that. Rachel couldn't take it."

"She wasn't the only one who couldn't take things," I said. His calling my mother a snob irked me, even though I knew it to be true.

"You don't see me jumping off any cliff, do you?"

"No," I said.

He started to walk off and I got up and ran after him, catching his arm. "Let's not quarrel, again, Armand. Please."

"I don't particularly enjoy it either," he said.

I stood on tiptoe and kissed him gently on the mouth. His lips were cold and I tasted the salt tang of the sea. When I drew away a spasm seemed to cross his face. "Please let's not be angry with each other," I said.

He reached out and brought me to him, his arm tightening convulsively as he pulled me back into the shadow of the rock. He kissed me then and the years dropped away. I was fifteen again and there was no wall between us, no bitterness. Everything that happened had been a dream—my going away, the school in Switzerland, my apartment in Paris, Rachel's death. I thought of nothing, no one, not Shirley, or Marlyn, or Kyle, only that Armand and I were together, that I was in his arms and he was kissing me. I arched my head back to look at him. His eyes were liquid with emotion, not metallic and hard any longer. "Armand . . . I think I always knew that I would come back, that we would meet. I've never stopped loving you. I . . ."

"It's too late," he said, pushing me away.

"What do you mean, 'too late'?" I asked, my heart constricting.

"We're not the same people we were then," he said, his voice gone cold. "You don't know anything about me."

"What is there to know?" I asked, suddenly afraid.



"Nothing. Forget it." He turned and began to walk away. Again I caught up with him. "Armand, why are you like this?"

"Like what?"

"Secretive—moody."

"Because I am." He had crawled back into his shell, the shell that had grown with him to fit his body, his mind, his skin, one that he had kept for the others and never for me.

"I don't like being brushed off," I said, running now to keep up with him.

"I wasn't aware that I was brushing you off."

"No. You're not aware of anyone but yourself," I said bitterly.

"Maybe."

"I hate it when you're in this kind of mood. I'm going back to the house."

"Suit yourself."

I let him go on, striding swiftly along the path, determined, an obstinate figure, so obstinate I wanted to scream.

The tide was still out and I decided to go back by way of the beach. I scrambled down the rocks and walked along the wet, hard-packed sand. The wind had freshened to a damp piercing chill and a thin line of fog was drifting toward the sun. The sailboat was gone and the sea had turned slate gray. The fine day was changing, had changed like my mood. I wondered why Armand refused to talk about his past, why he became so defensive, hostile even, whenever I questioned him. Had he had such an unhappy, miserable time of it, "drifting" as Phillipe had said? Or was there something else, something he had done, something criminal perhaps.

I had come to a place where the rocks shelved out into the sea. The waves of the returning tide were already beginning to break upon its outer fringes and I knew I must hurry to reach the path where I could climb upward out of the water's reach. I carefully picked my way across the granite shelf, slippery with wet seaweed and moss. There were little tide

pools in its pitted surface and in them I glimpsed stranded sea creatures, sea anemones and pincered crabs and tiny minnows.

On the other side the beach was even narrower, a thin strip of pebbled sand hugging the sheer cliff. I was within a few feet of the path, the point where the cliff broke and came down in a gentle slope, when a shower of small stones fell around me glancing off my shoulder. I stepped back and looked up.

A large boulder teetered on the edge, teetered and broke loose. My mouth hanging open in astonishment I watched as it came careening, tumbling over and over directly above my head. If I had been nimble-witted, I would have jumped aside to the lee of the cliff. But instead I froze, my legs rooted in the sand, my muscles rigid like the paralyzed prey in the path of charging monster. I was dimly aware of flashes of rock and sky, a dizzy kaleidoscope of approaching horror.

It could not have taken that boulder more than fifteen seconds to make its descent. It was an eternity to me, an eternity during which I lived my annihilation, sprawling upon the sand in bloody death. Then it was over. The boulder missed me by less than a yard, rolling, bouncing, splashing its way into the sea, while I looked on in cold, terrified awe.

Something made me glance up again. I caught a glimpse of deep green, a patch of color, a face. It was withdrawn so quickly the sight was barely more than subliminal. But it was enough. I began to climb the path, forcing my way upward through the shifting sand, pulling at the tufted grass with my hands. Nothing in nature had dislodged that boulder and sent it on its way to me. A human hand had done it. A person. Someone dressed in green.

I reached the top, panting, my eyes bulging with exertion. I saw a woman's figure dressed in a deep green pants suit disappear into a fog bank. There was something familiar about that figure, or rather what it wore, and with a quick shock to my heart I realized that the green outfit was one that my mother had bought when she had come to visit me in

Paris. The blood clamored in my ears, just as it had done the night Cosette and I had been in my mother's room and she had pointed to the tempest lit curtains. Rachel's ghost outside the walls of Storm House, walking the Island? Again, I felt reality slipping away.

Then I remembered. Marlyn was to have her pick of the clothes I had packed from Rachel's wardrobe. The green suit had been among them. The figure, I knew now, was Marlyn's.



## CHAPTER X

Anger stiffened my spine. Marlyn had almost killed me. And I, for one, was not going to let her get away with it. I hurried across the field, taking the shortcut path which led through the wood. The fog had already reached deep into the dark, towering trees, the piny interwoven branches lost in a gray, cold gloom. Though our wood was hardly a forest, being small in area, the trees in it grew with unusual density above a lush undergrowth as if in this one spot, where soil and sun and air were available in the right combination, they could make up for their inability to grow elsewhere on the windswept island.

The path, which I remembered well, was nearly overgrown with creeping vine, but still discernible as it wound through the nebulous trees. Here the iodine smells of the sea were mingled with spruce and balsam and the resinous odor of fallen evergreen needles underfoot, earthy smells, the smell of decay and resurgence. I seemed to be moving in a world of muffled wet grayness. Occasionally the white trunk of a birch would loom through the mist like a bleached skeleton risen from a shroud. The wood was a place of mystery in the fog, its silence a strange silence, without the murmur of insects, or the trilling of bird song. Now the only sounds were the drip-drip of the wet from the leaves and branches, the faint trickling of moisture from an overburdened clump of ferns.

I think I was a quarter way through the trees when I had

the sudden sensation that I was not alone on the path. I had heard nothing, no footsteps, no movement, yet I had the queer identical feeling I had experienced the morning before when I had looked up at the blank mullioned windows of Storm House. The feeling of being stalked, of being watched by hidden eyes.

I paused for a moment, listening. The dripping leaves, the distant wash of the sea. Nothing more. I turned to look behind, trying to penetrate the curling, weaving mist with my eyes. It seemed to me that the barely visible trees had marched closer to the path, that since my passing they had closed rank upon me, barring the way back. It was an illusion, of course. I was full of illusions these days. But there was something in the thick, moist air, an ominous tenseness which brushed along the back of my neck with icy, feathered fingers, and touched my heartbeat with a cold hand. I should not have taken the shortcut. I should not have attempted the wood. But it was too late now. It was easier to go on than to retreat.

As I turned to resume my way I heard the sudden sharp cracking of a twig. It was behind me. A bird lighting on a rotted branch? A small animal hurrying to a burrow? There was another crackling sound, the swish of leaves, the quick passage of feet across a bed of pine needles. Someone was there, someone was following me.

Terror seized me and I ran, crashing through the low hanging vines and bushy branches. Only the blind will for survival kept me from rushing pell mell off the path into the dense trees. As I ran it seemed that I could hear the sound of pursuit.

Marlyn, I thought. Marlyn had waited for me, hiding behind a boulder, then followed me into the wood. It could only be Marlyn. She hated me. First the careening rock, and now this. I was not afraid of Marlyn in the open, but in this fog thickened wood where she could spring out at me from behind a dark tree trunk or a quivering bush, I was terrified.

Did I say that the wood on the Island was not a large one?

To me that gray misty afternoon, racing along like a hunted fox before the hounds, it seemed vast, endless. I thought I would never reach the end. But at last the trees began to thin and I came out upon the grassland. I slowed my pace and finally halted, the breath rasping in my lungs. I glanced over my shoulder. The mist crept along the ground; already the trees were hidden by thick impenetrable fog. I saw no one emerge from the wood.

When I reached the house I waited on the terrace for another ten minutes, sitting on a stone bench. No one came, and soon the cold damp drove me indoors. I went into the kitchen. To my surprise Marlyn was there, dressed in a pair of jeans and a blue sweater. She was peeling potatoes at the sink. She gave me a quick, impersonal glance and then went back to her peeling, her eyebrows drawn together as she concentrated on her work. Her face was calm, not flushed like my own still was from having run a quarter mile through the woods.

"Well, that was a quick change," I said bitingly.

"What change are you talking about?" she said, turning her head.

"The change from a green pants suit, the one you were wearing when you pitched that boulder over the cliff."

"What boulder?"

"The one that nearly killed me."

"I didn't push any boulder."

"You're lying!" Fury rose in me. "I saw your face . . . I . . ."

Cosette appeared in the doorway. "What is it?" she asked.

"What's all the yelling about?"

"She says I pushed a rock down on her," Marlyn pouted.

"Did you?" Cosette wanted to know.

"Course not. Why should I?"

"I saw you," I insisted. I turned to Cosette and told her what had happened.

"Marlyn," said Cosette quietly. "I want you to tell me the truth."



"I didn't do it!" She stamped her foot, her eyes stormy. "Why does everybody blame everything on me?" She threw the peeler into the sink and ran from the room, banging the door behind her so that the windows shook.

"Why do you stand for that kind of thing?" I asked when I finally found my voice. "It's not like you."

"She's got a temper, but she means no harm," Cosette said.

"So you've told me. It still doesn't explain why you put up with her. . . ."

"She knew she wasn't supposed to wear any of Rachel's things until you left, but I suppose she couldn't resist. She's been deprived so long. . . ."

"I'm not interested in her hard luck story. You keep excusing Marlyn, defending her. It's almost as if the girl had some kind of hold over you."

Cosette untied and retied her apron, fussing with it, smoothing it down. She did not meet my eyes. She looked flustered, uncomfortable. This was the third time I had seen her at a loss, and it disturbed me. "I . . . I'm sorry, Cosette. It just seems odd. . . ."

"It's not your fault," she said. "How were you to know?"

"Know . . . know what?"

"Come into the drawing room, where we can talk."

I followed her into the drawing room, a place rarely used and then only when we had entertained a crowd of guests. The curtains were drawn and it smelled musty, shut in, as if it hadn't been aired in years. We sat down upon a sofa. "I really must have these dust-sheeted," Cosette said. "Your mother would never permit dust sheets in the house, but now. . . ." Her voice trailed off.

There was a portrait of my mother hanging over the fireplace. Phillipe had painted it shortly after he and Rachel were married. He had done a beautiful job in capturing her personality, especially around the eyes. They were a strong direct blue, proud eyes, not the eyes of a woman who could crumble easily.

Cosette, gazing at it, said, "I tried to tell Rachel . . . I meant to. . . ."

"Tell her . . . ?" For one wild moment I thought perhaps that Marlyn had been blackmailing Cosette, that the "hold" I had half jokingly accused the girl of having over Cosette was because she had caught Cosette in the act of stealing either from Phillipe or Rachel.

"About Marlyn," she said, turning to me. "The day Rachel died we had a big fight. She wanted me to fire Marlyn. 'She's impertinent,' she said. 'She's making a nuisance of herself, hanging about Phillipe.'"

"I've always done the hiring and firing of the maids," I told her. "That's my affair."

"And she blew up. You know how angry your mother could get. I tried to tell her why I didn't want to fire Marlyn, but I couldn't. I brooded about it all afternoon. Then I made up my mind that I would go to her after dinner—no more delays—and confess everything."

"Confess? I can't imagine what *you* had to confess."

"No, I suppose you can't. Neither could Rachel. Or any of you. I'm Cosette. Cosette, a Legrun, honest, loyal, faithful to the Tourands. Working hard, organizing those large dinner parties, riding herd on the help, comforting, arguing—all for the Tourands. 'You're one of the family,' that's what they always said. No one ever thought of me as being Cosette Legrun, a private person with a life of my own." She made a wry face.

"I often wondered why you didn't marry," I said, "and have a family of your own."

She thought for a moment. "Looking back, I suppose I can't really blame anyone for that, but myself. After all, I was not kept in the dungeon, in chains. Yet . . . yet. . . ." She turned suddenly and looked defiantly into my eyes. "I do have my own—now. After all these years, I have my own. Not much, from your point of view and certainly not from Rachel's, but my own. Marlyn."

I thought that somehow, for some esoteric reason, Marlyn



had struck a chord of affection in Cosette, and that Cosette had adopted her as the daughter she had never had.

"You see," said Cosette simply. "Marlyn is my granddaughter."

For a moment I was stunned into silence. Her confession seemed so preposterous. "Then you *did* marry."

"No," she said. "No. That was the whole thing. The secrecy, my not wanting to tell Rachel. I never married." She sat pleating her apron. Her hands were brown spotted, the veins standing up like blue ropes. "It's a shameful story and I've carried it around for so long now. . . ." She sighed. "Well, what does it matter?" She paused, looking up at Rachel's picture, and addressing it, went on, "He was a servant here. Not anything as grand as the butler or the chauffeur or the master of the *Rachel II*, but a menial. He did odd jobs, sometimes waited on people at cocktail parties or cleaned up after them. He was a French-Canadian, could barely speak English. I guess that's what brought us together, since my French was still pretty good. Mike was his name, or at least that's what he called himself. A burly young man with a big yellow moustache. It was right after your mother married Phillipe. I was thirty-five, no thirty-eight, a spinster and life was passing me by." She shook her head. "I'm not going to start weeping for myself, making excuses. It just happened. And when I found myself pregnant, he . . . why he disappeared."

"There wasn't anyone to go to. Rachel would have dismissed me on the spot. And Phillipe, well Phillipe always deferred to Rachel. Whatever she wished was his will, too. I did have a cousin, Bette, though, living in Lyons, France. I asked Rachel if I couldn't have a few months off for a long visit with her. I hadn't had a real vacation in years and since it was during the winter season and Phillipe and Rachel were planning a trip to Bermuda, she let me go. I had my baby there, a girl. I named her Simone. I . . . I . . ." Her eyes were glittering with unshed tears. "I had to give her up. To Bette. There was no other way. What else could I do?"



"I corresponded with my cousin regularly and from her I learned that Simone had married a GI and had come to this country. She did not know where. I tried to trace her, but had no luck until one day I got a letter from Marlyn, saying she was my granddaughter. Simone had found out her true parentage. Her husband had abandoned her and she, herself, was dying of leukemia. I got her to a hospital, but she lasted only a week. I brought Marlyn here. So you see—do you understand why I am protective of her? Why, at last, I have something of my own? I never forgave myself for giving Simone up. Now I can atone for that. Marlyn, twice abandoned, won't have to go through that again."

"Why didn't you tell Rachel? I think she would have understood."

"Your mother? Not on your life. Did she understand you and Armand? You know what happened there. Rachel could overlook the sins and transgressions of others, her guilt-edged, so-called friends, their scandals, their affairs, their divorces, but never the ones committed by those close to her, those in this house." She raised her eyes to the portrait again. "After that fight we had when she laid down the law about my firing Marlyn, I knew I had to tell her. If Rachel still wanted Marlyn to go, I would go with her."

"Maybe you underestimated her. Maybe, after all these years, she had mellowed."

"I'll never know," said Cosette. "When I went to her room just before dinner, she was already lying on the rocks below Cliff's Edge. Dead."

I did not know what to say to Cosette. She had been a fixture for so long at Storm House, methodical, predictable, a person you could set your watch by, depend on. But there had been a different Cosette, one we had never suspected. I wondered how well I had really known anyone here at Storm House—Armand, Rachel, Phillipe.

Beyond the curtains I heard a spatter of rain on the windows. "Did you ever tell Phillipe?"

"No," she said. "Not yet."

We fell into another silence. There was a worn spot on the sofa's arm, frayed at the edges as if someone had nervously plucked at it. My mother had loved that sofa, an old one having reputedly belonged to the Empress Eugenia. She would not have it recovered, nor could she be persuaded to alter or "modernize" any of the furniture at Storm House. Rachel had liked old things, the older, the shabbier, the more fond she had been of them. They represented stability to her, order.

Her death had not been orderly, though. It had been a nasty, messy business. It had occurred to me more than once that Rachel had chosen a way to die little in keeping with her passion for order. She could have taken sleeping pills one night, an overdose, placed the note on the bedside table, climbed into bed and fallen asleep where she would have been found in the morning, peaceful, composed, not lying broken on the rocks. "It was not a pretty sight," Armand had said.

I thought, again, of the letter she had written to Barry and wondered if it had anything to do with Marlyn. I turned to Cosette. "Are you certain my mother didn't know Marlyn was your granddaughter?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking . . . thinking about the letter she wrote to Uncle Barry. If she did know, or suspect, she would have wanted Barry to check Marlyn out."

"He would have confirmed her worst suspicions. Marlyn has a jail record."

"A jail record?"

"She served six months for selling an illegal drug. Some kind of pill. She told me about it herself. She needed the money. But that was three years ago."

"I wasn't thinking of a jail record, or anything like that. Rachel might have thought she was an imposter."

"An imposter?"

"Marlyn as your only living relative would inherit



whatever money you have." Cosette, I realized, probably had a considerable amount. She had always received a generous salary, including room and board, and her wants had been simple. Even if she had sent sums of money to her cousin for Simone, she had probably put by enough to make it tempting for someone down on his luck.

"Rachel didn't know," said Cosette. "She had no way of knowing that Marlyn was my own flesh and blood. And if *you* are wondering, too, well Marlyn is not an imposter. She knew of Bette, as did her mother, and Simone described Bette to me, the house she lived in, down to the smallest detail." Cosette got to her feet. "I know you don't like Marlyn. She isn't the kindest, most lovable person in the world, even to me. But you must not think the worst of her. And as for her toppling a boulder on your head—really Laura!"

"Right after it fell, I saw her there above me, looking down. Now, what would *you* think in a case like that?"

"All right," she said, "we'll ask her again."

Marlyn was sullen, but she answered all Cosette's questions, looking directly at her and ignoring me. She had been walking back from the Cove. She had not seen the boulder fall, but she had heard it. When she came to the spot where it had been dislodged, out of curiosity, she had looked over the edge. Yes, she had seen me, and she had also seen that I was not hurt. That was the extent of it.

She sounded convincing enough, but I was still dubious. "And you didn't follow me through the wood?"

She gave me a cold look. "No. What gave you that idea? You saw me here in the kitchen when you got back."

"Look . . ." Cosette said to me, ". . . you know rocks fall all the time around here. Wind, weather, rain. Laura, be sensible. Why should Marlyn or anybody want to push a big rock down on your head? Why should Marlyn follow you through the wood?"

There was no answer, none that I could give that wouldn't sound foolish.



Late that afternoon I met Armand on the staircase. He was carrying a large khaki sleeping roll and a duffel bag. "Leaving?" I asked.

"No, I'm moving my gear out. Down to Fisherman's Cove. Might as well stay there. This house gives me the willies."

"Do I give you the willies, too?" I asked. I knew I was begging for another fight. But a fight, harsh words with Armand, was better than being ignored. At least when we quarreled he was conscious of my existence.

"Sometimes," he said, hoisting the bag on his shoulder and going past me.

Why did I persist? He didn't care. He had had a moment's weakness, a moment of forgetfulness, perhaps when he had kissed me in the shadow of the rock. Yet I couldn't give up. I wasn't ready to erase him entirely from my life. If I were like Marlyn I would have run after him, dogged his footsteps, thrown myself at his head. But I was not Marlyn. I had too much pride. So I decided to go clamming instead. It was a devious method, on my part, to arrange a chance meeting with Armand, since our favorite clamming area had been a spit of land opposite the Cove. He couldn't miss seeing me there and maybe . . . well, maybe was better than nothing.

I set out the next morning with pail and rake, promising Cosette I would return with enough clams for a good, old fashioned chowder. I was in luck as the tide was out and the spit, a tidal bar, was fully exposed. Looking across the small rippled inlet I could see the fishermen's houses plainly in the Cove, weathered, wind bleached with cracked window panes and rusted orange lobster buoys hanging from their walls. I wondered which one Armand had chosen. I did not have to wonder long.

A woman suddenly emerged from the nearest cottage. It was Marlyn. She was wearing the vivid green suit again. A moment later she was joined by Armand. He put his hand on her arm and she looked up at him and laughed. The sight of them, so intimate and close to one another, struck me like a

bolt of white hot lightning. Marlyn with those luscious curves, those baby blue eyes. I had the sudden ferocious desire to put my hands through her cornsilk tresses and pull until she screamed. It was terrible, that storm of instant emotion. Now I could understand Shirley's flaming face when she had seen Kyle and me together in the library. Jealousy. I had always thought it beneath me. It was a consuming, shameful, demeaning thing, but I could not push it away. Marlyn and Armand. Why not? I thought bitterly. Armand had no resentful memories of *her*, no quarreling, nagging encounters. She would give herself to him compliantly, freely, without the encumbrances of "do you love me?" or "do you remember?" Life had taught Marlyn to be practical. Philippe, she wanted as a husband: he had stability, perhaps she even thought he had money, but in the meantime Armand was a passing amusement. They had so much in common, too. Both were orphans, both had been on their own, struggling for existence. Not like me, sent to expensive schools, never having had to work a day in my life, protected, safe from financial worries. I wondered, too, as I watched them standing there together, if they had known each other before they came to the Island. If somewhere on the mainland, both "drifting," their paths had crossed. Certainly this was not their first meeting alone. Only yesterday Marlyn had said, "I was walking up from the Cove. . . ."

They had seen me. I could tell because Marlyn was pointing my way. I quickly turned my back on them and began raking in the mud, as if my only concern was digging for clams. I pulled and pushed furiously about, tossing the clams as they came helter skelter into the bucket. I did this for perhaps ten long minutes, and then unable to restrain myself, I looked back over my shoulder. They were gone. I gathered up my rake and pail and shovel. I was all for pitching them into the sea. I did not think I ever wanted to see a clam or to think of clam chowder again.

## CHAPTER XI

It was the next day. I remember we had two visitors. The first was Eben Crowder, owner of the general store in Doryville. Eben was also our local woodcarver, an excellent one, shaping and polishing his beautiful cherrywood images of birds and animals during the long winter months, and selling them to the tourists in the summer season. He had come to see Phillipe, so he had told Cosette. But Phillipe was indisposed—a flare-up of an old stomach ulcer—so Cosette had asked me to talk to him.

He was waiting in the library when I came down, a tall, thin man with pink veined ears and a hawk nose. He had a package done up with string under his arm. "I was sorry to hear about your mom, Miss Laura," he said, removing his cap.

"Thank you, Mr. Crowder," I said. My memories of Eben Crowder were associated with licorice. As children our village excursions had always included a visit to his barn-like general store. There we were permitted to choose from the great glass jars on the counter filled with taffy, jaw breakers, and ropes of black licorice. The licorice had invariably been my choice.

"I didn't want to trouble you folks, you being in mourning and all," Eben Crowder said, "but I thought you'd like to have this." He held out the package.

"Why . . . what is it?" I asked, taking it from him.



"It's something Mrs. Tourand asked me to do. About a week before she died. I just now finished it. We—the wife and I—talked some about me bringing it here and finally she says, 'well, maybe they'd want it up at the House, anyway.' "

I sat down and undid the string, peeling away the white butcher paper. It was an osprey, a sea hawk—once plentiful in the area, now practically extinct—carved in cherrywood. About a foot high, its great wings spread, its tail fanned out, the osprey looked as if it had that moment lighted on the carved twig underneath.

"It's beautiful," I said. "So real."

Eben beamed at me. "I thought Mrs. Tourand would of liked it. She had me do it for Mr. Tourand's birthday."

"Oh . . .," I said, suddenly remembering that Phillipe's birthday was only a few weeks away. "He couldn't help liking it. You say my mother ordered this—when?"

He took a small, frayed notebook from his back pocket, opened it and ran a bony finger down the page. "She came in September 16. I have it here." He held the book out to me.

I glanced at it. *Sept. 16. Osprey for Mrs. Tourand.* I ran my finger over the bird's smooth wings, thinking of Rachel and how she must have come into Eben's store that day, the bell tinkling as she crossed the threshold. It seemed to me I could smell the dust, the decay of apples, fresh ground coffee—and licorice. Eben would have looked up from the counter to greet her, or perhaps it had been Minnie Crowder, his wife, calling over her shoulder to Eben in the back, "Here's Mrs. Tourand." They would discuss the weather for a few minutes, then Rachel would have said, "I'd like you to do something special, something for my husband's birthday. . . ."

"When . . . when my mother commissioned you to do the carving, did she seem unhappy . . . sad?" I asked.

He gave me a quizzical look.

"What I mean is, did she seem her usual self?"

"She was always a gracious lady." He pulled at his lip. "I get your meaning. No . . . no she didn't seem sad to me."

Rachel had not been sad. But then my mother was very skilled at being "gracious" to outsiders, hiding her true feelings beneath a smile, a polite interested question, a show of light conversation.

"It's not the money, you understand," Eben was saying. "I just wanted you folks to have it."

"Money?" I asked in surprise.

He twisted the hat in his hands. "Yes, she said she'd send me a check . . . but then she . . . she died."

I stared at him so long his face took on a ruddy blush. "You can ask the missus," he said. "I never got a check."

"No, Mr. Crowder, it's not that . . . I don't for a minute doubt your word. She must have—forgotten." She did not forget. Rachel did not like to owe money, especially to the local people. "She sold whatever she could," Phillipe had said, "to pay her bills." Rachel was too orderly, too keenly proud of her responsibility as the "lady of Storm House" to have overlooked Eben's check, even if she were depressed, even if she had no wish to go on living. It came to me again that her going, aside from the act itself, was strangely out of keeping with her character. Phillipe had said that on the fatal day she had appeared more cheerful, as if she had come to a decision. And coming to a decision wouldn't she have put her house in order? It was not like Rachel to leave strings untied, even after death.

"How much was it?" I asked.

He mentioned a sum which I thought was ridiculously small for such a work of love and craftsmanship. "I'll run up and write you a check," I said. "It will only take a moment."

Soon after Eben left we had our second visitor. I had gone outside to chat with Bob, who was raking pine needles under the spruce outside the kitchen window, when I heard the sharp staccato beat of an outboard motor. Looking down through the hazy mist I saw a small boat approaching the dock. It pulled up, sputtering and coughing, and a few minutes later a man came up to where Bob and I stood. He was a scruffy looking character, dressed in old jeans and

cracked felt boots, his abundant wiry hair standing out from weasel features like a fright wig.

"Is Armand around?" he asked.

Bob stepped a little closer and peered at him intensely. "Is that all your hair?"

"All mine, man," he said, giving Bob a wide grin. He smelled of fish.

"Armand's down at the Cove," I said. "He's staying in one of the cottages there."

"How do I find it?" He was not a young man. He was more Kyle's age than Armand's.

"I'll take you," I offered. I had to keep myself from staring like Bob. It wasn't his appearance which aroused my curiosity, but the fact that he was looking for Armand.

"If you could tell me how to get there, I don't like to bother you." I had the feeling he was trying to find a polite way to refuse my offer. My curiosity sharpened.

"It's no trouble."

We started off together. I introduced myself and he told me his name was Eliot. "Nice pad you have there," he said, waving back at the house.

"Yes, we like it."

"Must cost a bundle to keep a place like that going," he said.

"Yes."

"You a relative of Armand's?"

"A step cousin. I guess you'd call it. And you?"

"I'm not a relative," he said. "Just a friend."

"Have you known Armand for a long time?" I asked, trying not to betray my keen interest.

He stooped to pluck a blade of grass. "Off and on." His voice casual, too.

"Armand and I grew up together," I explained. "But he . . . he seems changed."

"Is that right?" He put the blade of grass between his teeth and began to chew on it.

"He's become so close-mouthed," I said, watching Eliot



from the corner of my eye. "Never talks about his friends."

"Is that so?" he murmured.

We walked side by side for a few minutes. "Where did you and Armand meet?" I asked.

"New York," he said. "At a coffee house." He looked away out toward the sea. "This island belong to the Tourands?"

I was not to be turned from the subject that easily. "Were you both living in New York?" I asked. "Or visiting?"

"Just passing through."

I knew he resented my questions, that he was becoming more and more guarded and I wondered why he was so reticent. After all, I had not asked him anything about himself or Armand that was so very personal. Yet I could not keep silent. "Are you from around here?" I asked, knowing by his accent that he wasn't.

"No, I'm not," he said shortly.

A flock of savannah sparrows flew out from the short grass ahead of us, their wings making a hollow, whirring sound. "You think I'm nosy, I suppose," I said. "But we don't have many callers these days."

"Is that so?" It was his catch phrase.

"No. When my mother was alive, we had a good many people coming to Tourand Island. That is, before she had financial reversals."

"Ain't that always the way," he said.

"Yes, I suppose it is."

We walked on in silence then, until we reached the Cove.

"Armand's boat is here," I said. "So I guess he's around."

Armand must have seen us from the window. He was waiting at the cottage door and there was a small frown between his eyes. "So, it's you, Eliot," he said. He did not seem very happy to see his friend. "As long as you're here, you might as well come inside."

Eliot turned to me. "Thanks, Laura. I think I'll be able to find my way back." He went in followed by Armand who closed the door behind them.

I had been dismissed.

But not entirely. I did something then I had never done before in my life, something which would have shocked Rachel and Phillippe as well. I went around to the side of the house. The window there was opened the width of a hand. I stood below it and listened.

"I thought we agreed you wouldn't come here," I heard Armand say.

"It's been three weeks," Eliot said. "And nary a word. I thought something might have happened."

"Nothing's happened yet. I'm working on it."

I put my hand to my throat. Working on what? What was supposed to happen?

The next words were muffled and distant. They must have walked away from the window. I strained my ears to catch what they were saying, but all I could hear was the indistinct rumble of their voices. Then suddenly from just above I heard Armand again. "I think you ought to leave before someone else sees you and starts asking questions."

"Cool it," said Eliot. "Nobody would recognize me in this get-up."

It was a disguise then. The jeans, the hair, the scuffed, cracked boots. Why should Eliot wear a disguise? Why was Armand afraid he'd be recognized? Recognized as whom?

"Okay," said Eliot. "I'm leaving, but the old man was wondering. . . ."

I did not wait to hear more. Their voices were too dangerously close. I would have died rather than have Armand discover me. I started to edge away when my foot dislodged a large stone. Shrinking against the wall I watched in horror as the stone went cracking down the slope.

"Wait!" Eliot's voice came to me. "Are there people around?"

"No," said Armand. "not unless. . . ."

I dropped swiftly to my knees and crawled under the pilings of the house just as the window racketed up. "There's no one," said Armand.

I let out my breath. Overhead there was the sound of footsteps, murmuring voices. I crouched there, listening, wondering what I should do. There was the smell of rot and unplugged drains, and I could feel the dampness of the earth through my slacks along my legs. I was safe for the moment, but I could not stay or I might be discovered when Eliot left the cottage.

Slowly, carefully I crept out and sidled around to the back of the house. I went through the small dead garden and bending low, climbed the slope, picking my way gingerly through the debris of discarded lobster and mussel shells. Once at the top I did not pause to look back, but cut across the field to the path.



## CHAPTER XII

I could not fall asleep that night. My mind was still in shock, still full of Armand and his friend, Eliot, and what they had said. Why had Armand really come back to Storm House? "It's been three weeks. . . ." Eliot had said. Was he in hiding from someone? "The old man was wondering. . . ." Who was Eliot? Were he and Armand both criminals running from the law? It would explain Armand's silences, his refusal to speak of the past.

Yet, I argued with myself, there could be a simple explanation for that conversation I had overheard, one that had nothing to do with crime, or runaway mobsters. Armand could have come to the Island because he was writing a book or a play and wanted privacy. Or he and Eliot might be involved in some project, a building or business enterprise, something that required concentration and time. But even as these thoughts passed through my mind, I knew they were childish. I did not want to believe that Armand was skulking down at the Cove because he was in hiding. It was not like Armand, not like the Armand I had known.

I tried to block this worrisome, never ending self debate out by reading a novel. But after the first ten pages, I tossed it aside. Meanwhile the clock had gone from twelve to one to two and I was still wide awake. I put on my robe and went down to the bar in the library looking for a glass of brandy. Brandy had been my antidote for insomnia before, on those

tense, sleepless nights prior to an exam. I needed something. I could not lie awake all night, my mind going in circles.

The liquor supply was low, both brandy bottles empty. There was more, I knew, in the wine cellar just below the kitchen. I debated for perhaps a minute, asking myself whether I couldn't do without, and finally, because I hated to face the prospect of a long, interminable night, I went through the dining room to the kitchen. I had another moment of hesitancy after I had switched on the light at the top of the cellar stairs. It was a naked bulb and it made a bright circle, but around it, crowding in, were those deep, infrangible shadows. A sigh ran along the hidden passages below: the wind, the underground sea, or Mignon's ghost?

I flushed out the ghostly images already seeping through to my mind's eye, swallowed my foolish cowardice and marched down the stairs. It would hardly take a minute or two, I told myself, turning at the bottom and opening the door to the wine room. The air was cool and damp, fragrant with the lost odor of spilled wine, a bottle broken once, the fermented grape smell still lingering behind. The brandies were kept separately in a wooden cabinet. I went to it and unlatched the small door. I had my hand on a bottle when I suddenly heard the sound of footsteps overhead. Someone was walking in the kitchen.

Instinctively, I suppose, for I feared it might be Kyle and he would notice the light in the cellar, I quickly slipped through the door and clicked off the alternate switch to the stair light, then hurried back into the wine room dousing the light there also. I closed the door softly, leaving a crack for my eye.

I heard the kitchen door open and saw the swinging beam of a flashlight. The staircase creaked under the weight of slow, stealthy footsteps. A tiny sliver of fear pierced my heart. Why the stealth? Why use a flashlight and not the usual light as I had done? I inched the door shut as the beam hit the opposite wall, leaning against the wooden panel, my forehead damp with cold sweat. What if it were Kyle and he

should come into the wine room and discover me behind the door? In another moment, to my relief, the footsteps passed. Working the door open I saw a man's back, no more than a bulk of darkness, receding in the reflected glow of the flashlight. I could not tell who it was. Before I could slip out and back up the stairs, the figure stopped and swung the light over the low damp ceiling and the sweating walls. Then he placed the light in a niche above him and the full beam fell upon his face.

It was Armand.

As I watched he began working at a block in the wall with a small knife, chipping away at the plaster. He went on this way for several minutes and then began twisting the block from the wall.

Curious, and forgetting myself, I opened the door another inch. It squeaked at the hinges and Armand instantly turned his head. It was too late to retreat. He was already reaching for the light. I came out just as its beam caught me between the eyes.

"Laura. . . !" His voice was shocked, shocked and angry. "What in the hell are you doing here?"

"I . . . I came down to get some brandy in the wine room." I waved my hand vaguely.

"With the lights off?" he said, coming up to me. I could see his face now. It was cold with rage. "Why were you spying on me?"

I had heard that accusation before. Marlyn. But this was not Marlyn, this was Armand, a man I had known, a man I had loved intimately. A lover, a friend. But he was neither now. He was a stranger, the same half-mad stranger who had stood with me on Cliff's Edge.

"No . . . no," I stumbled. "I wasn't, Armand. Why should I do that?"

"Don't lie to me." He pushed me roughly against the wall. "You followed me." He brought his face close to mine. I saw the slight scar above his lip, the one he had received in a fight long ago with a bully from the village. It had gone



white. It always went white when he was beside himself with fury. It terrified me. And yet mingled with my terror was a strange excitement. It was the same feeling I had experienced when I first rode a carnival roller-coaster and we were poised on the brink of a great plunge for a fraction of a second, my mouth dry and my heart beating wildly, just as it was beating now.

"What were you looking for, Armand?" I said. His hand shifted from my shoulder and rested at the base of my throat. His eyes were like living coals. I felt his fingers curl and uncurl around the tiny pulse beating there. I shivered. "Armand," I whispered. "You wouldn't. . . ." He would not strangle me, I thought even then, he couldn't.

Suddenly, abruptly he let me go and cocked his head as if listening. I had heard nothing, but apparently Armand had. He turned from me and hurried down to where he had been working on the wall. "Hold this. . . ." he beckoned to me with the flashlight. "Hurry!" I did as he asked. He quickly replaced the block of stone, brushing the fallen plaster into the cracks of the floor. Then he pulled me through the passageway to the wine room and pushed me inside just as the kitchen door opened.

He switched on the light and hid the flashlight behind a row of bottles. Then he gathered me in his arms and began to kiss me, very methodically, without passion. My mouth, my eyes, my cheeks, my hair. "Don't say anything," he whispered in my ear.

I was too stunned to speak.

I felt a draft at my ankles and turning my head away from Armand saw Kyle standing in the doorway.

"Lover's meeting?" he asked with a sneer.

"Yeh," said Armand. "Would you mind closing the door?"

"Here in the cellar?" said Kyle, looking from Armand to me, his eyes going over my robe. "It's not a place I would take a girl."

"We came down for a bottle of wine," said Armand. "Any objections?"

"No," said Kyle, leaning against the door jamb. "Are you sure it was wine? There's plenty upstairs."

"It was brandy," I interposed, cuttingly. "Some drunk emptied the bottles in the library."

"And since you're asking questions," Armand put in. "What brings you to the cellar at two in the morning?" He released me and went over to the brandy cupboard.

"I heard some noise. I thought we had burglars."

"You must have sharp ears," said Armand, pulling a bottle from a rack and blowing the dust from it. "We didn't make a sound, did we Laura?"

"No," I said. "No."

"How's about Courvoisier?" Armand asked.

"Fine," I said.

Armand tucked the bottle under one arm and put the other about my shoulders. "Now, if you'll excuse us?"

Kyle stepped aside and we went out the door and up the stairs. "Oh," said Armand over his shoulder. "Turn the light off when you're through, would you Kyle?"

As soon as we were in the kitchen, I asked, "What was that all about?"

"Shhh. Not here. We'll have to go up to your room."

When we reached my room and Armand shut the door, he sank down on a chair. "I think I'll have a little of that brandy now," he said.

"I don't have a corkscrew."

"I do." He took out his knife, the same one he had used on the wall in the cellar and began to cut away the wrapping on the brandy bottle. He did not speak until he had pried the cork out. "Got a glass?"

I brought a glass from the bathroom. "Well . . ." I said.

He poured a little of the amber liquid into the glass and stretched it out to me. "No," I said. "You drink it." My taste for brandy had gone.

He took a swallow and shuddered.

"Well . . ." I said, no longer afraid of him. "Are you going to answer my question?"

He looked up at me. It was a long searching look. "How do you feel about me?" he asked.

Taken by surprise, I floundered, "Why . . . I don't know, now. I thought you . . . you were going to strangle me down there."

"Did you?" He made a grimace. He swirled the brandy around in his glass, gazing at it thoughtfully. "Then I don't think I'd better answer your question."

"Armand," I said after a moment. "Are you mixed up in something . . . something . . ." I searched for the right word, and not finding it finished rather lamely, ". . . something bad."

"Maybe. Maybe I am." He plunked the brandy glass down and got to his feet and headed for the door.

"Wait . . . Armand, please. Can't you tell me? You used to tell me everything."

"I used to do a lot of things, Laura," he said sadly, and closed the door softly behind him.



## CHAPTER XIII

We had our first northeaster the next day. All afternoon the barometer had been falling and by dusk the black, ugly clouds crowding the sky had circled the Island, pinning us down in the heaving sea. The wind blew in squally gusts. It whistled and whooped around the house flinging whirlwinds of scattered leaves and loose pebbles and sand against the windows. I could hear the roar of the surf, the breakers thundering without pause like the endless passage of low flying planes.

The rain came as I was getting ready for bed, drumming against the windows in a sudden lull of wind. I crawled between the covers, and listening to the sporadic shriek of the wind, the beat of the falling rain. I soon fell into uneasy dreams.

I was startled out of sleep a few hours later. The wind, though less wild, was still blowing hard. Above it I heard the banging of a shutter down the corridor. The room had become cold, icy cold and drafty. I sat up and reached for the extra blanket at the foot of the bed and saw that the door had blown open. I frowned at it, puzzled because it was a heavy door and I remembered distinctly that I had closed it firmly when I had come in.

The passage beyond was pitch black. The shutter kept banging. Someone had forgotten to close the window to it and the draft had opened my door. I ought to go down and

attend to that window, I thought, the rain will make a puddle on the carpet. Yet, somehow, I could not force myself out of bed. I kept staring at the yawning hole the door made in the darkness. As I stared a faint glow appeared in the doorway. For a moment I thought it might be the reflection of light from the landing below. But then the glow grew slowly brighter.

A cold nausea seized me. Instinctively I knew what was coming even before I saw it. And I did not want to see. I did not want to look. But my neck, my eyes, had become fixed. I seemed to have no power over the muscles that would turn them away.

It was there! The figure shimmered. A white cape, a hood. Mignon! "She comes with the storm," Cosette had said.

And all the while the cold, an invisible vapor of icy breath snaked about my shoulders, along my arms. Without taking my eyes from the doorway, I pulled the blanket up to my chin. It had no warmth. My bones were melting with the freeze. Was that chimera in the doorway, an image from my brain, a hallucination? The hood swayed, the light grew brighter. I was shivering from head to foot now, my knees would not be still. The ghostly arms raised slowly toward the hood.

"What does she look like?" Armand and I eagerly asked Cosette.

"When she throws back her hood, then you will see."

"Does she have long, golden hair?"

"No . . . it's a death's head with hollow eyes and large, grinning teeth. . . ."

A death's head.

The glow had become more intense, outlining the white phantom sharply against the darkness. The arms reached the hood and it began to fall.

I shut my eyes then and screamed and screamed and screamed.

The sound of my screaming seemed to go on and on long after I had cowered down on the blanket, echoing, bouncing from the walls. Dimly I became aware of a pounding on the door and when I looked up the lights were on. Phillipe stood in the doorway, his figure swimming in the bright, sudden light. "What is it, Laura? For God's sake, what is it?"

"I . . . I . . ." My throat was raw. I could not speak.

"Are you all right?" Phillipe came up to the bed. His face was drained of color.

"I . . . I think so."

"What happened?"

"I . . ." How to tell him? Now that it was over, the lights on, the room transformed from darkness into reality, I could not find the words to describe my horror. "I . . . I saw something at the door . . . it was open and there was . . . a . . . a ghost. Mignon."

"You saw what?" There was incredulity in his eyes. "The door wasn't open when I got here."

I wet my lips. "I . . . I didn't close it. It was open and it . . . she was there . . . a white hood. . . ."

He didn't say anything, but kept looking at me. "Cosette. Has Cosette been talking to you?"

"I saw it . . . I saw it!" I said wildly.

"You must have had a nightmare."

"No. I was wide awake. And the door was open. You see I thought the wind had opened it. . . ." I paused. "You do believe me?"

"Yes, yes," he said soothingly, the way one would to a child.

Over Phillipe's shoulder I saw Cosette come into the room. She was dressed in a thick, long robe. "What is it?" she asked, as Phillipe had done. "Has something happened?"

"You heard me scream?" I asked.

"It was enough to wake the dead," she said.

I shuddered at her choice of words.

Phillipe said, "Laura says she saw a ghost."



"A ghost?" It seemed that Cosette's white face turned even whiter.

"It was in the corridor," I said. "It had a hood. . . ."

"Mignon!" she exclaimed, I thought I saw a look of relief in her eyes. Cosette was not afraid of Mignon. It was my mother's ghost she feared, I thought, remembering how she had fainted in my mother's room. She was frightened of Rachel's ghost and fleetingly I wondered why.

Phillipe made an exasperated sound in the back of his throat. "There you go, Cosette. Egging Laura on. She's had a bad dream. . . ."

Cosette interrupted, "If she says she saw a ghost, I suppose she did." There was some of the old asperity in her voice.

"Hogwash," said Phillipe. "It's all hogwash. This business of white hoods and clanking chains . . . and moaning."

"She didn't moan," I said.

"I've seen her," Cosette said. "I've seen Mignon many times. And you can't tell me that I was dreaming."

"I can't tell *you* anything," said Phillipe. He sighed and ran his hand through his wispy hair. "I suppose there are some things I can't understand, but Mignon. . . ." He shook his head. "Well, I'm going back to bed. Lock your door, Laura, if that will make you feel any better."

Cosette said, "A locked door means nothing to ghosts. They can. . . ."

"Have it your way," he said with a disgusted wave of his hand.

After he left, Cosette turned to me. "I can get you a key if you want one." I had never locked my door at Storm House, never had the need to. "There must be one somewhere down in the storeroom. Although, as I said, . . ."

"It's all right, Cosette. Don't bother. What difference does it make?" And at that moment it didn't. Suddenly I felt exhausted, beaten, flattened, as if I had spent the night buffeted by the storm outside. I did not want to go on talking about ghosts. I wanted to forget Mignon, this debate about

doors, and phantoms who could or could not walk through them.

But when I awoke in the morning with the rain still thrumming at the window, my mind went immediately to the apparition I had seen. Could it have been a dream, a nightmare, as Phillipe had said? Or had my brain become infected with the brooding house and accepted Cosette's fancy? My daylight self tried in vain to reject the evidence of the night. I had seen something, even if it was a hallucination, even if my sanity was losing its hold on reality. The thought that it might be the latter depressed me.

The cloud of gloom I carried must have been thick as pea soup because Phillipe remarked on it as we were eating lunch that noon. "You're not letting last night get you down?" he asked.

Everyone's eyes turned to me. They were all there, I remember, Kyle, Shirley, Cosette, Marlyn, and Armand, too. He had come up from the Cove to replace his kerosene lamp which had upset and broken during the night and had stayed for lunch.

"I'm afraid so," I said, answering Phillipe.

"What about last night?" Shirley asked sharply, suspiciously. "What happened last night?"

"She saw Mignon's ghost," Cosette said.

Marlyn snickered and Kyle laughed outright. It made me feel like a fool.

"Did you see it, really? Tell me about it," Shirley said, leaning forward. "Was she standing in the doorway—her face like a skeleton's?"

"You know, Shirley," said Phillipe, pointing his fork at her, "you have an amazing lack of tact. It's not what Laura saw or didn't see that's important. She's got a bad case of the blues. She *did* lose her mother, in case you've forgotten. And that's enough to distress anybody."

"I don't see what that's got to do with Mignon's ghost," Shirley said defensively.

"People who are sad and unhappy brood. Their minds get

low and often are receptive to morbid suggestions."

It was exactly what I had thought and Phillipe's words made me more depressed than ever.

"If the house is getting you down," said Shirley, "then maybe you ought to leave."

Phillipe pushed his plate away with an angry motion. "She can stay as long as she likes," he said.

After lunch Phillipe took me aside. "Don't pay too much attention to Shirley. You know what kind of tongue she has. She can't help it. But I wonder if she isn't right—about the house, I mean. The atmosphere here being unhealthy for you."

"It isn't exactly doing wonders for you either," I pointed out. "Your ulcer hasn't bothered you for years."

"I know, I know. But whether I like it or not I'm stuck with Storm House. I could never sell it. To see anyone but a Tourand living here . . . why that would be worse than an ulcer. I have to stay. But you . . . there's your apartment in Paris, your school, your friends. . . ."

"Yes," I said, staring into space. That life, the one I had lived these past few years, seemed such a long way off, such a long time ago.

Phillipe took my hand. "Laura, I'm getting worried about you. Really. I don't like to see you this way. It's enough to have watched your mother fall apart. Don't start the same thing, *please*. . . ."

I squeezed his hand. "Don't worry, Phillipe. I'm still managing to hang together." I gave him a small smile.

"That's better," he said.

"Somehow I can't leave yet," I said after a moment. "There's something I feel . . . I . . . I don't quite know how to explain it. But there's something I feel I have to finish."

"Finish?"

"Well . . . there's Armand, for one. . . ."

"Oh, Laura, give it up. Armand is a hopeless case."

It was easy for Phillipe, who had never loved, never even liked Armand to say, "give it up." He did not have my



memories. He had never known that part of Armand, the boy who could laugh and be tender and open, the Armand I had lost.

"There are so many things about him now, I don't understand. . . ." I was thinking of Armand's visitor and the conversation I had overheard beneath the window at Fisherman's Cove.

"Who understands him?" Phillipe shrugged. "I hate to see you still pining after him. You're young, lovely, intelligent. There must be dozens of men out there, likeable, fine men who would be glad to love, to marry you."

"You sound like Cosette," I said.

He gave me a bleak, sad smile.

I went upstairs to my room and sat by the window watching the rain. The sea was calmer now; the wind had died. I wondered how strong the gale had been, if it had done much damage in the village. Armand had said it had blown out a window at his cottage and upset the lamp. Had the same blast of wind opened my door?

I turned and looked at it. A heavy door. I got up and walked over to it, and began opening and shutting it, testing its weight. It was not the same as a frail window exposed to the full onslaught of the storm. The wind had not opened that door. A ghost? Or—it came to me then—someone *masquerading* as a ghost.

I remembered the conversation at lunch when I had admitted seeing the ghost, how everyone had looked at me. Marlyn had snickered and Kyle had laughed. But Shirley had leaned forward with avid interest. "Tell me about it," she had said. "Was she standing at the doorway. . . ?" Not the window, or at the wall, but the doorway. ". . . her face like a skeleton's. . . ?" It was almost as if Shirley had slipped into a costume and was wanting my approval. But suppose she *had* worn a costume? Suppose she had dressed herself in a hooded cape, concealing a light under it to give her figure a ghostly glow.

If only my theory was right. If only I could prove it, for

peace of mind, if nothing else. I knew it was useless to confront Shirley, to ask her point blank. She would deny it, of course. I would have to find the cape she had used. The cape, if it were hers, might still be in her room. I glanced at my watch. It was two-thirty. Shirley and Kyle sometimes spent the afternoon in the library playing two-handed rummy. With any luck they would be there now.

I went down to the library. The doors were open and I saw the two of them at the card table, each with a drink at their elbow. I quickly, quietly, tiptoed across the entry hall and through the door which led to the guest wing. I ran lightly up the stairs. It would only take a minute, two, three at the most. I paused on the landing, wondering which of the rooms was the Brennan's. Since there were no other guests at Storm House, they would have their choice. I reasoned, the largest and airiest room, the one my mother had laughingly dubbed the "honeymoon suite."

I was right. I recognized one of Shirley's dresses carelessly thrown across the bed, Kyle's jacket draped on a chair. I walked over to the wardrobe and opening its doors, began to paw hurriedly through the clothes hanging there. I found nothing which resembled a cape. I went through again, slowly, more carefully. The cape was squashed between a beaver coat and a gabardine suit. I pulled it out. It was a long cape of thin, white wool with a hood. In the dark, lit up from underneath with a flashlight, it would have appeared whiter still. I saw from the threads at the neckline that it must have had buttons, red ones which had been removed.

I put the cape back exactly where I had found it and in doing so caught sight of a piece of black material on the shelf above. I stood on my toes and pulled it down.

It was a mask, a cheap Halloween mask, white on black, a skull's face, the face I was meant to see when the hood was pulled back. Whatever small doubts I had, fled. It had been Shirley, all right, Shirley who was trying to frighten me from Storm House. Had she freed the dogs too? If so, it was prob-



ably Shirley, not Marlyn, who had sent that boulder crashing down the cliff. She could have done it. It was possible, very possible. She could have toppled the boulder, then quickly hidden behind a stone outcropping when she saw Marlyn coming down the path.

But why? Why all this elaborate, complicated scheming to be rid of me? Surely her basis for jealousy was insubstantial. Even a fool could see that I did not welcome Kyle's advances. But she might have got wind that I had been questioning Cosette about my mother's death. And if Shirley had something to hide, if she had murdered Rachel, then my curiosity was a danger to her. By her own admission she hated my mother, had resented her. Perhaps she had never really meant to kill Rachel. She might have met up with my mother at Cliff's Edge, quarreled with her there, and in a fit of rage pushed her over the side.

I stared at the mask in my hand, the skull face grinning up at me in evil mockery. What was I to do? Accuse her in so many words? Tell Phillipe?

The sound of approaching footsteps brought me up sharply. I heard the murmur of voices. They were coming back! I looked about me wildly. Where to hide? The bathroom? Under the bed? The doorknob rattled and I thrust myself into the wardrobe, squeezing behind the clothes. I had not had time to close the doors, and though I was hidden by the thickly packed garments I felt exposed, naked to sight.

"I never have been so bored in my life," I heard Shirley say. "I hate this place. It's like being buried in a tomb."

"This place is what we signed up for," said Kyle. "Just be patient."

"It wouldn't be so bad if we didn't have to sit around and wait," Shirley complained. "If we could get cracking."

"We will. Once she's gone."

*She.* Were they speaking of me?

"I wonder why it's taking so long for her to leave," Shirley



said. "If I had a choice between this dump and Paris I wouldn't waste an extra minute."

It was me.

There was a small silence. I heard the rasping strike of a match and the odor of cigarette smoke reached me.

"You won't be all that sorry when she goes," I heard Shirley say. "You're kind of sweet on her."

"Aw, get off my back, Shirley. She's just another broad."

"I wish I could believe that."

"You can. With so much at stake, I'm not about to forget what we're here for."

Here for? *Here for what?*

"You went for the mother too," said Shirley. "You tried anyway."

"She was a lot of woman," I heard Kyle say.

"And what about me? You think I enjoy your chasing? The understanding wife, sitting around like a dummy while you have your fun? That's not my style."

"Look, Shirl, you ought to know me by now. It's just a passing hobby of mine. It doesn't really mean a thing. When it comes down to the crunch there's only one woman I want. And it's you."

There was a long silence, punctuated by the sound of a kiss. "I just wanted to be sure, that's all," Shirley said.

"Come on, I have a little business on the mainland. In Daveport. You can do some shopping while I attend to it. Then I'll buy you a sarsaparilla."

"A sarsaparilla!" Shirley exclaimed in disgust.

"It won't be long now, honey, and it'll be champagne all the way."

"A mink," said Shirley. "The first thing I'm going to get is a mink. I'm sick of that beaver."

"Anything your heart desires. Meanwhile get that old beaver and we'll putt over to the mainland."

The beaver was inches from my face. I shrank back against the wall, a cold sweat beading my forehead, wishing

desperately that I could dissolve into thin air. I heard Shirley's footsteps. The clothes in front of me began to sway. I tucked in my stomach and held my breath. Her hand paused a hair's breadth from my arm. Paused—while my heart expanded, throbbing like a hollow drum. Surely she could hear it? The clothes hanger rattled as she pulled the coat from it.

"I can hardly wait," she said, "until I can throw all this junk out." I heard her move away. "By the way, you were pretty good in that cape last night. Scared the bejesus out of her."

"Who me?" Kyle asked in surprise. "I thought it was *you*."

There was a long pause. "No," said Shirley slowly. "It wasn't me. I didn't get up last night. I meant to. But I slept right through. You're not kidding me, are you?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Well, it wasn't me either." Another long pause. "If . . . if it wasn't me or you . . . then who?"

I heard the rasping flick of a match again. "Well, what do you know?" Kyle said. "This place has got a real, live ghost after all."

"It isn't funny."

"I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. I don't know who or what it was. Probably all in her mind anyway. Are you coming?"

"Yes, but I think I'll change that sarsapatilla to a scotch and soda. Double."

The wardrobe doors slammed shut, leaving me in blessed darkness. My knees were trembling so they barely held me upright. Another moment and I would have crumpled to the floor.

I heard the outer door open and shut. I let out my breath, but still I did not move. I remained there, crammed against the wall, the suffocating odor of *Ile de Nuit*, Shirley's sweet, sickening fragrance cloying my nostrils.

I waited until I was sure they had gone down the stairs and out of the house. Then I pushed through the clothes, stumbling from the wardrobe. When I finally reached my room, I was shocked to see that I was still holding the skeleton mask, damp and limp with the perspiration of my fear.



## CHAPTER XIV

I slept badly that night, waking often from a variation of the same terrible dream. I was walking along the path in the wood, a white hooded figure always a few feet ahead of me. Each time I caught up with it the face beneath the hood would be different. Sometimes it was Shirley's, sometimes Kyle's. Once it was Armand's. Finally a knocking on my door, soon after daybreak put an end to my dreaming.

It was Cosette, very pale, her eyes red-rimmed as if she had been weeping. "Marlyn's gone," she said. "She left yesterday for the village and she hasn't come back."

"Are you sure?" My head felt heavy and there was a furry taste to my tongue.

"Her bed's not been slept in."

"Maybe she stayed the night with a friend," I suggested.

Cosette shook her head. "No. She doesn't know anyone in the village. She's never spent the night away—not since she's been at Storm House."

"When did she leave?" I asked, slipping into a robe.

"About noon. It was her day off. She hitched a ride on the mail boat. She sometimes does that." The mail boat stopped at Tourand Island three times a week.

"Maybe she couldn't find a way back."

"No. She'd call then. Someone would have gone after her in the launch. She was always good about calling me."

She sat down heavily on a chair. "I just have this feel-

ing . . . that something terrible has happened."

I bent down and put my arm around her shoulders. "Don't anticipate the worst. She could have met up with someone."

I was thinking of Marlyn's undulating walk, her come-hither eyes.

"She would have called," Cosette repeated.

"There's probably a very simple explanation why she didn't. I'm willing to bet she shows up before the morning is gone. Meanwhile let's go down and have some breakfast. I'm hungry."

We had breakfast, or rather I did. Cosette drank cup after cup of black coffee, sitting across from me, a white strained look on her face. Every now and then she would get up and go to the window, peering out at the dock. About eight-thirty we heard the sharp quick beat of a motor and Cosette hurried into the yard. She returned a minute later, disappointment dragging at the corners of her mouth. "It's Bob," she said.

At ten o'clock she had me put in a call to the Penelope Inn, a new motor lodge on the outskirts of Doryville to see if Marlyn had checked in. She hadn't. I telephoned the post office asking to speak to the man who ran the mailboat. He was still out, I was told, and wouldn't be back until afternoon. There weren't many other places to call in Doryville but I tried them all; Eben's general store, Hamburger Heaven, Ma Bloom's antique shop. No one had seen Marlyn.

"She might have taken the bus into Daveport," I said. Daveport was twenty miles from the village, much larger, with a greater variety of shops.

"Yes," Cosette agreed. "I wouldn't know who to ask. Maybe . . . maybe you ought to call the hospital there." I drew a blank at the hospital.

By noon the calm which Cosette had tried to maintain all morning was cracking badly. Her hands shook so when she brought the lunch tray in from the kitchen I made her sit

down while I finished serving the food. Phillipe, Kyle and Shirley, aware by now of Marlyn's true identity (Cosette had blurted it out as they filed in for lunch), were all certain that she was bound to turn up at any moment.

Their assurances fell on deaf ears. Cosette kept shaking her head and biting her lip. Sensing that she was growing more and more frantic by the minute, I said, "As soon as we're through here, I'll go over and look for her."

Cosette shot me a look of such gratitude, I was ashamed I hadn't suggested it earlier.

"Do you want me to go with you?" Phillipe asked. He looked tired, very wan, as if he had had a poor night of it too. Except for sipping a glass of milk, he had not touched his food.

"No," I said. "It isn't necessary."

"You can't go alone," he said.

"I'll go," Kyle interposed. Shirley glanced sharply at him.

"We'll both go," she said.

They were the last people I wanted along with me. "No, really, it isn't necessary. I . . . I'll ask Armand," I said, hoping to settle the argument. "He won't mind."

To my relief no one challenged my decision.

"I'll give you the keys to the car," Phillipe said, getting to his feet.

I had meant to slip away without Armand, explaining later to the others that I had not been able to find him, but he came walking up the path just as I left the house. With Cosette on the doorstep there was nothing else I could do but tell Armand about Marlyn and ask him to go with me.

He agreed, rather too quickly I thought. "What's the matter?" he asked, noticing the surprise in my eyes.

"Nothing—except you're being so agreeable."

"I'm not. I need to go over anyway, for some rope."

As we pulled away from the dock, I asked, "Have you any idea where we can start looking?"

"None." He wasn't going to exert himself making conversation, I could tell that already.



"Where does she go on her day off?" I shouted above the roar of the motor.

"How should I know? Didn't you ask Cosette?"

"Why shouldn't you know? You and she seem quite chummy," I yelled.

He didn't answer, didn't seem to hear me. He stared straight ahead, his eyes fixed on the dark line that was the mainland.

We checked at the post office first. By that time the man who had given Marlyn a ride the day before had returned. Parnell, was his name, a moustached little man with cropped brown hair and keen hazel eyes. Certainly, he said, he remembered Marlyn. He had given her a lift more than once. A lively girl, pretty, too. Laughed a lot. ". . . although she seemed kind of serious yesterday," he recalled. "Not her usual pert self." He had kidded her about it.

"Serious?" I asked, plucking the word from his voluble account. "How do you mean serious?"

"Oh . . . I don't know. She usually laughs at my corny jokes, but not yesterday. She didn't say much. Seemed to have something on her mind. If I didn't know her better, I'd say she looked . . . well, scared." He smiled. "That's dumb, I guess. What's a girl with a face and figure like that got to be scared of?"

Armand shrugged and did not say anything. He seemed to have lost interest in our conversation. He put his hands in his pockets and wandered off.

"Did she say where she was going?" I asked.

"Nope. Just thank you when we got to the landing."

After that Armand and I walked the town, stopping at all the places I had reached by phone that morning. "Don't you think it strange?" I asked Armand as we left Eben Crowder's store. "No one saw her."

"Maybe she caught the bus into Daveport at the crossroads. I don't see what all the fuss is about. Marlyn probably found herself some man."

"I promised Cosette I would look for her," I said firmly. "And that's what I intend to do."

"Okay, Daveport it is. We'll take the car."

I got the keys out of my bag as we cut across the rickety dock to the garage. The weathered brown boards were splintered, uneven underfoot and with my mind miles away, I stumbled clumsily. Armand caught my arm, but not before the keys slipped from my hand, falling between a large crack in the planks. We heard them as they dropped with a small plop in the water below.

"That ties it," I said in exasperation. "Now what are we going to do?"

"No sweat," he said. "We can make do."

We turned up a short street. "You won't find a rent-a-car in this place. You know that."

"Don't need to rent a car," he answered.

We had come to the garage where Phillipe kept the car. Armand got a small knife out of his pocket and had the padlock open within a minute. "Get in," he said, rolling up the door.

Once in the car, he fiddled around under the dashboard, then with a jerk brought two small wires out. He spliced them and the next instant the motor roared into life. "Where did you learn that trick?" I said.

"Here and there," he said casually.

Here and there—off and on. Armand and his friend were experts in vagueness. Maybe that's how one became living on the fringes of society, foot-loose, always just "passing through," never putting down roots.

"We might try the hospital there," I said. "They didn't have any record of her when I called this morning, but she might have come in since."

Daveport had been a somnolent little town of some 8,000 when I had last seen it. Now, I noticed from the Rotary sign on the highway as we entered, it had grown to 18,500. "Some kind of electrical plant moved in," Armand explained

when I brought it to his attention. "And a lot of new people came with it."

The Daveport Hospital was a one storied, white shuttered, red brick building. I had been a guest there at the age of twelve for a few days having had my appendix removed. Since then, I saw, two wings had been added. The lobby in the old part of the building, though, had not altered. It still had its shabby chintz sofas and milking stools and frilly shaded lamps. When we entered a middle-aged woman behind the desk was at the switchboard looking harried and flustered.

"Visiting hours are between two and four, seven and eight," she said, yanking a wire from the board and plugging in another.

"We're not here to see anyone," I said. I told her about Marlyn.

She flipped through a card file in front of her with one hand, while the other was busy with the board.

"No," she said after a moment. "We have no Marlyn Tomkins. Sorry. I'll call down to emergency."

We waited another three minutes until the board was clear and she rang emergency. Emergency had no record of her either.

When we were in the car again, Armand asked, "Where now?"

"The bus station?"

The bus station, next to a bowling alley, was seedy and rundown, its plate glass window yellowed with the dust and soot of passing traffic. The man at the ticket window couldn't remember anyone fitting Marlyn's description. "I got too much to do," he said, his jaw working over a toothpick, "to notice who comes and goes."

We drove slowly down to the business heart of Daveport. When we reached Grand Avenue, the main street, Armand parked in front of Tibb's Hardware Store. "I'll run in here and get my rope," he said. "It won't take a minute."

I sat in the car and watched the people pass—a thin,



gaunt man walking a poodle, two teenage boys in jeans, a woman pushing a stroller—my eyes automatically searching for a flash of bright green, the green pants suit Cosette said Marlyn had worn. I noticed that Grand Avenue had expanded since my time, the shops and business establishments stretching for over a mile, spilling into the side streets that were once residential.

When Armand returned I got out. "Let's walk down the street a little way," I suggested.

"Okay." He threw the rope into the back seat. "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack." We started up the street, passing a candy store, a haberdashery, a drug store. "Don't you think she's just taken off?" Armand asked. "Things are pretty slow on the Island. No excitement, no boy-friends. . . ."

"I wouldn't say that," I said, giving him a sidelong glance. "Besides she had a good thing going."

"Phillipe? He couldn't care less."

"I wasn't talking about Phillipe."

He stopped short and looked at me, then shook his head. "She's not my type either."

I wanted to believe him. I tried, I really did. But I don't think anything short of a passionate declaration would have satisfied me then.

We resumed our walk. "Even if things are a little boring on the Island," I said, "why should she leave? Cosette indulges her so."

"Why shouldn't Cosette? She's her grandmother."

"You knew about it before. . . ."

"Marlyn told me," he said.

I wondered what other secrets Marlyn had shared with him. We went on side by side, crossing the street. There was a dress shop on the corner, Trudy's Boutique, and as we went by my eye caught the window display, a flame orange coat spread artfully on a low-backed chair and a mannequin beside it wearing an afternoon dress of the same color. It was the sort of vivid shade Marlyn would find appealing.

"I have a hunch," I said, putting my hand on Armand's arm. "Let's go inside for a minute."

A saleslady, tightly girdled in black crepe, was arranging packaged hose on a small rack at the counter. She came forward. "Can I help you?" she asked, smiling.

"I'm looking for a friend," I described Marlyn. "Do you remember her coming into your shop yesterday?"

"Yes," she said. "Indeed I do. I won't forget *her* in a hurry. That pants suit she was wearing was a genuine St. Ives. And she left it."

"Left it?"

She nodded. "That's right. She bought a dark gray suit and wore it out. Told me to give hers to my favorite charity." She gave me a quick, comprehensive look, taking in my Parisian coat and shoes. "She didn't steal it or anything like that?" she asked anxiously.

"No," I said. "It was hers." I told her why we were looking for Marlyn since there didn't seem any point in concealing it. "Did she happen to mention where she was going or what she was planning to do with her afternoon?"

The woman pursed her lips, small thin ones, carefully outlined in purple pink lipstick. "No . . . no, she didn't."

We turned to go.

"Wait. . . ." She did ask me where the public library was, if that's any help."

"It is," I said. "A great help. And thank you."

The library was not far from the main section, red brick like the hospital, set back from the street on a wide, hedge-bordered lawn. The librarian, a plump woman in her forties, had not been there the day before. "But," she said, "Mr. Walton was here. Perhaps he can help you. He's in the back. I'll get him."

Mr. Walton was a youngish man sporting a bow tie in rainbow colors. Again we were in luck. He, too, remembered Marlyn. "She came in here about three-thirty," he said. "She sat in the magazine section." He pointed to a windowed alcove flanked by two rows of magazine racks. "The reason I

eh, noticed . . . well, we weren't all that busy and she was a . . . well a nice looking girl." He had a habit of squeezing his eyes shut and smiling at the end of each sentence.

"How long did she stay?" I asked.

"All afternoon until closing time. We close at seven on Thursdays."

"Did she speak to you?"

"Only once. She kept looking up every time the door opened and I thought maybe she was expecting someone. So I went over and asked her, real casual-like, if her friend was late." He held his eyes shut and grinned.

"And what did she say?"

"She said it was none of my business."

That would be like Marlyn. "And was that all the conversation you had with her?"

"That's all. At closing time she got up and left."

Outside dusk was beginning to fall, purple with the haze of burning, October leaves. "Why do I have to do all the talking?" I asked Armand, annoyed at his seeming indifference. It was not that I cared that much for Marlyn—in fact I was angry with her for having put her grandmother through such agony—but I was concerned for Cosette.

"You seem to be doing all right," he said.

"You're not worried? Curious at least. Don't you think her behavior was rather strange?"

"No, not for Marlyn. I still believe she got bored with Storm House. She probably decided on the spur of the moment she didn't want to go back. She might have hitched a ride out of Daveport, taken the bus. Gone to Portland, Boston, anywhere."

"Maybe. It also seems that she didn't want to be recognized, as if she were afraid of it."

Armand put his hands in his pockets and looked up at the sky where the first star of night was already brilliant. "Could be," he said.

"But of whom? Who was she afraid of?"

"I have no idea," he said.



"I thought she confided in you," I said acidly.

"What gave you that idea?"

"Never mind," I said, angry frustration sweeping over me.

"Talking to you is like trying to catch a greased pig."

"You mean I'm slippery?"

"That isn't the half of it," I said, leading the way to the car.

I had Armand drive me to the police station. It was a last resort. We had reached a dead end and there was no other place to go.

Armand parked at the curb. "I'll wait here," he said. "It's a fifteen minute parking zone. Try to hurry it up."

"I'm not running in for a loaf of bread," I said, slamming the door.

The sergeant who took down the details of Martyn's description didn't seem terribly interested. He read the questions he asked me from a printed form in a mechanical, monotone, looking up every now and then at a point above my head. I wondered how many of these printed forms he had filled out, how many people—mothers, fathers, sisters, wives—had sat in the chair I was sitting in, the arms worn smooth with anxious, nervous elbows. Too many. The sergeant had probably stopped counting a very long time ago.

"We'll let you know if we find anything," he concluded, placing the sheaf of papers under a large stapler and bringing the chrome handle down with his fist. "Keep in touch."

Armand had the motor running when I came out. "Damn near got a ticket," he said. "What took you so long?"

"There were a dozen forms he had to fill out," I said.

"That figures."

"I don't think he's going to look very hard."

"How can he? Do you realize how many runaways there are in a year—a week—every day? The whole damn police force could do nothing else but try to chase them down and they still wouldn't come close to finding a fraction of the reported cases."

"Is that why they never found you?" I asked.

His face turned suddenly dark. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," I said, fear and that queer excitement nibbling at my heart. "What did you think I meant?"

He studied me, coldly. "Don't play games."

It was a dangerous game, his eyes told me, and for a moment I was tempted. But then I said, "I was wondering if they tried to find you when you dropped out of school."

"*That*. Phillipe and Rachel never bothered I suppose. I think they were both relieved to have me go."

It was dark night when we finally headed the launch back to the Island. "I don't know what I'm going to tell Cosette," I said, tired and dejected.

"Tell her the truth," Armand said.

"Maybe Martyn's home," I said, suddenly brightening. "Maybe while we've been running our heads off, she came home and has been there all the time."

She wasn't. Cosette met us at the door. "No luck?" she asked, searching my face with strained, hollow eyes.

I shook my head. "We've reported it to the police," I told her. "But I wouldn't rest my hopes on them."

"They'll never find her," she said, wringing her apron.

We were both wrong. They found her. The police found her the next morning, alone at the bottom of a rocky ravine, her head hanging from the window of a stolen, wrecked car. She was dead, had been for thirty-six hours.

## CHAPTER XV

Phillipe and I took Cosette to the morgue in Daveport to identify Marlyn and afterwards, at the request of the police, to the station for a "few routine questions." Cosette could give no reason for Marlyn's hasty departure or why she had stolen a car. Looking drawn and on the verge of collapse, Cosette spoke in a low, controlled voice as she told the brisk, uniformed young man in charge that her granddaughter had been at Storm House for nearly a year and seemed happy there.

"You know that she had been in jail and on probation at one time for selling barbituates?" he asked.

"Of course," she said, bristling for a moment in her old manner. "But that was several years ago. She's never had any trouble since. She was a good girl."

We were in a small partitioned room heated by an oil stove under the window to a stifling temperature.

"She got along with everyone at the house?" the brisk young man asked.

"Very well," Cosette answered.

He looked questioningly from Phillipe to me.

"Certainly," Phillipe said, and I mumbled a "yes," avoiding his eyes. I did not see why I had to go into the hostility which had existed between Marlyn and myself. And what difference did it make anyway, I wondered, loosening my



coat from around my neck, if Marlyn got along with people at the house or not?

"What about her friends?" the young man wanted to know.

"She didn't have any," said Cosette. "Not any from around here. Sometimes she'd go into Daveport to do some shopping or to an afternoon movie. She always came back at night."

"Kind of dull for a young girl," he remarked.

"She never complained about it," said Cosette.

He looked down at the paper in front of him. "She seemed afraid of someone, according to this notation. I believe it was you, Miss Scofield, who said that when you came in to report her missing?"

Both Phillipe and Cosette looked at me, a little startled. "Why yes. . . ." I murmured. "It was only a guess." I repeated what I had told the sergeant the previous day about Marlyn's buying a new pants suit, about her afternoon in the library.

He nodded without speaking. The oil stove hummed in the silence. A car passed on the street outside, honking its horn.

"Do you have any idea how the accident happened?" Phillipe asked.

"We think she was sideswiped, forced off the road," he answered. "There were tire tracks alongside hers at the spot where she broke through the rail and went over. Do you know of anyone who might have wanted to harm her?"

So that was why he had asked about her relations with the people at the house.

"No," said Phillipe. "If she had any enemies, I certainly did not know about it. Did you?" This to Cosette.

She did not seem to hear. She was staring out of the window at a police car parked at the curb. She was silent so long, the brisk young man cleared his throat. "Miss Legrun. . . ."

"No," she said, turning. "I can think of no one."

"Do you believe someone pushed her over . . . deliberately?" I wanted to know.

"It's possible," said the young man. "But more than likely she was either drag racing or was hit by some drunk weaving from side to side. Whoever it was didn't stop, that's for sure, just beat it out of there."

"Hit and run," said Phillipe. "Makes you sick."

On the way back to the Island Phillipe said, "Why don't you go away for awhile, Cosette? Take a long vacation. Go to Paris with Laura. I can scrape together the money, if you need it."

She looked at him with dull, tired eyes.

"Yes, why don't you?" I put in. "I'd love to have you."

"I'll think about it," she said.

Later when I went to see her in her room, I brought the subject up again. "It will do you a world of good to get away," I said. She was lying in bed, her face a waxy yellow against the pillow.

"I don't feel up to a trip," she said wearily. "I'm too sick, too old."

"Nonsense," I said. "You've got plenty of the old spark left. I saw it for a minute this afternoon when we were talking to that policeman."

She shook her head. "It's gone, Laura. Gone. I just don't have it anymore."

"Sure you do." It was a statement, I knew, which convinced neither of us.

"But you ought to go," she said. "Laura. . . ." She pressed my hand. "Don't stay. The happy times here, you can't get them back. There's a curse on this house now."

"That's a bit melodramatic, don't you think?" I smiled at her. The smile was not very convincing either.

"There's been two deaths here," she said, her deep eyes solemn. "Death always comes in threes."

"That's an old, silly superstition," I chided. Nevertheless, a little breath, a chill puff of air like the brush of moth wings touched my skin.

"Call it what you want."

"And is that why you think I ought to leave?" I asked sarcastically, annoyed because I was allowing her to frighten me. "You're afraid I'm going to be number three?"

"Any of us might be."

I threw up my hands. "Okay. If it will make you happy I'll go. But I can't leave you now without any help."

"Bob's sister has agreed to come," she said.

"Tomorrow, then. I'll pack my bags after the funeral and make my reservation."

They buried Marlyn in the Tourand plot in Doryville. Phillipe had suggested it. Originally Cosette had wanted Marlyn interred next to her mother in Boston. But Phillipe had prevailed upon her to change her mind. It would be easier on her, he pointed out, than having to take that long drive, and she could visit the grave whenever she chose. Indeed, she looked so terribly white and exhausted I was glad Phillipe had made the suggestion. He did not look well himself. "My stomach," he said with a painful grimace when I asked him. "It's acting up again."

"Why don't you see a doctor?"

"He'll only prescribe the same old pills and diet."

The services were brief, thankfully. It was a dismal day, depressing, with black thunderous clouds blowing down from the North. I could not cry for Marlyn, even though death had cancelled my fear of her. But I did for Cosette. It was a wretched twist of fate for her. Whatever I had thought of Marlyn, she had meant a great deal to Cosette. And I wasn't at all sure that in time Marlyn would not have grown fond of Cosette and returned some of her affection. I kept thinking of the way she had died, and of the brisk young police officer's questions. An accident, he had finally concluded. A drunk or a drag racer had forced her from the road. But that did not explain why she had stolen the car. "If I didn't know her better, I'd say she looked . . . scared," the little postman had said. Marlyn barely smiling. Marlyn not laughing at his corny jokes.



I pictured her taking the bus to Daveport, walking the main street, glancing over her shoulder every so often, then ducking into Trudy's Boutique. She had bought a gray outfit, she who loved bright greens and reds. Gray, the color of anonymity. I saw her sitting in the library, turning page after page of a magazine, the words, the pictures meaningless, her eyes going to the door each time it opened, her heart skipping a beat. Who had she been watching for? She had waited until closing time, seven o'clock, waited until dark. I imagined her hurrying down the darkened window-lit streets, looking into cars until she found one with the keys left in the ignition. Was it fear which drove her to slide into the driver's seat, turn the key? Was it the headlights in her rear view mirror, pursuing, blinding lights which sent her over the edge?

Why had she been afraid?

Her past, like Armand's, had been vague and cloudy. She had been in jail, on parole for selling barbituates, that much I knew. Suppose that huge underground network of drug traffic had linked her to someone at Storm House. Someone who was dangerous to know, someone she was brashly blackmailing.

It was then that I recalled Kyle's words the afternoon I was hidden in the closet. "When this is over . . . it will be champagne all the way."

*This*. Whatever "this" had meant it was potentially lucrative. Shirley was going to buy a mink when they "got on with it." A deal with drugs? They had gone to Daveport the same afternoon Marlyn had disappeared and they had not returned for dinner. "I've got some business in Daveport," Kyle had said.

Was that business Marlyn?

Although Phillipe and Cosette seemed to accept Marlyn's death as accidental, I continued to puzzle over it. That puzzle, however, did not interfere with my promise to Cosette. I had to finish up with the task in my mother's room, and then make plans to leave. The room, I had to admit, frightened

me. My skepticism concerning ghosts had been considerably shaken by the Brennans, each thinking the other had masqueraded as Mignon when neither had done so. There were two possibilities. One, my imagination had gone wild; or two, I had seen an actual phantom, Mignon's spirit which Cosette claimed had never left the corridors of Storm House. If it was the latter then . . . well, what of it? I thought bravely. Hadn't I read somewhere that the only harm ghosts do is to instill fear? It was whistling past the grave yard, I knew, but I would be gone soon. Besides, I assured myself as a hedge against second thoughts, ghosts always manifested themselves after dark, not in broad daylight.

The boxes I had packed had been removed, but there were still a half dozen empty ones lying exactly where I had left them. I opened the curtains and turned on all the lights. There was a small radio on the bureau and I clicked it on. Violins, soft and melancholy, flooded the room. I fiddled with the dial until I found a rock station; that's what I needed, something loud and raucous. I had had enough of melancholy. I began taking down the remaining dresses in the wardrobe. When I finished the dresses I started on my mother's sweaters, jackets and coats. Like the dresses she had quite an assortment, more than one person could possibly need or use. Before I packed each away, I went methodically through the pockets. I was doing this on a light suede jacket when my hand closed around some scraps of paper. I drew them out, nudging the waste basket over with my foot so I could throw them away. They had handwriting on them, I noticed. Rachel's.

*Dear Laura* . . . a fragment read. My mother had evidently started a letter to me, then changed her mind and torn it up, stuffing it into her pocket. Curious. I took the scraps over to the dressing table and laid them out. Most of them had somehow become sodden with moisture and were illegible, and I realized with a start that the suede jacket was the one my mother had been wearing when she died. Chunks of the message were missing. What I could make out was fragmen-



tary. But it was enough. More than enough.

The date was intact, September 26, Tuesday, the day she had written Barry, the last day of her life. *Dear Laura . . . Armand is here . . . still morose . . . But the important thing . . . a terrible discovery . . . criminal . . . is guilty of . . . faced him with it . . . done no good. . . tell Phillipe . . . if Barry advises . . . call in the police. . .*

That was all. I read it again and again, shifting the scraps about with my fingers, trying to form those words written in that bold, slanting script into a different pattern, a different meaning. It didn't work. There was no denying it. Not any longer. The evidence was before me, had always been. I had not wanted to face it. I had wanted to believe my mother died because of Marilyn, Shirley or Kyle. I never had the courage to link Armand's shady past with Rachel's death, not openly, not honestly. How could a man I had known better than myself, loved so absolutely, be a murderer? And yet there it was before me. The motive. Rachel had found Armand out. *Armand . . . guilty of . . . call in the police. . .*

Now all the scattered images and thoughts which had whirled and danced in my brain settled into a picture, like the bits of paper on the dressing table, taking on a comprehensive form. Armand bitter. Armand sitting in my room, reading a book, pretending that he had come to borrow it when he had really come to search my room. For what? He might have been afraid Rachel had written some kind of incriminating letter, one that he must destroy in case I began to ask suspicious questions about him.

Armand drifting. An odd job here and there. Armand at Cliff's Edge staring down at the rocks below. "I killed a man once. . . ." Armand gripping my shoulders with fingers of steel. "Just don't drive me too hard. . . ."

And Rachel had written to Barry, *There is something I must speak to you about.* Barry asking, ". . . did she have any enemies?" Cosette, her face the color of paper. "They only come back when they have died a violent death." Had Cosette known? No, I did not think so. Cosette was only



speaking from that deep peasant intuition of hers. If she had known of Armand's guilt, she would have come forward at once. Cosette would not feel the need to protect Armand.

The picture grew, taking on breadth, dimension. Armand had quarreled with my mother, as Cosette had said, "It was a big one." And I, I with my questions, questions. The boulder crashing down the precipice, and Marlyn pouting, "Why does everyone blame everything on me?" Marlyn. Perhaps my jealousy was unfounded. Maybe Marlyn's curves had nothing to do with her relationship to Armand. She could have been blackmailing him. A dangerous game. At some point Marlyn must have realized just how dangerous and tried to flee.

I remembered how, only two days ago, Armand and I had gone in search of Marlyn, how he had hung back while I did the talking. He had not gone into the police station with me. Had he been afraid of being recognized? "What took you so long?" he had asked, the motor running when I came out. I recalled, too, how easily he had started Phillipe's car without a key. Was that the way he had started it, I wondered, when he had taken it out of the garage the day he followed Marlyn?

There were so many things that pointed to Armand. How could I not have seen? Elliot, that scruffy looking friend of his and their conversation. "Nothing's happened yet. I'm working on it." Armand in the cellar, chipping away at the plaster, not wanting Kyle to see, to know. What had he hidden there—stolen money, contraband goods?

It was there in my mind, all of it. Armand had come back to the Island, using it as a refuge, a hiding place. And Rachel had found out. She had written to Barry first before telling Phillipe, before telling anyone. Rachel who had wanted to be fair. She had wanted Barry to check on Armand and make sure. A mistake, a terrible mistake which had cost her life.

Standing there, staring at those fragments of Rachel's letter, it seemed to me that I could see now, clearly, all too clearly, that last day of her life. She would have gone to Ar-

mand first, confronted him with what she suspected. Armand would not have denied it. "So what?" it seemed I could hear him say. "What do you care what I do with myself? You never cared before."

"I shall have to tell Phillipe," she would have said. "And the police."

"Suit yourself."

Rachel had gone back to her room. Phillipe was in the studio painting. He would be there until dinnertime. Phillipe was never to be disturbed when he was at work. That was a rule of Storm House. My mother lived by rules. She had never thought of breaking one, not even then.

And Barry was out of town on a case.

So she had sat down to write two letters, one to Barry, one to myself. Barry's she had posted, mine she had destroyed. Why? Perhaps she had decided to wait until she had talked to Barry and Phillipe before she wrote to me. The why of it did not really matter. She had torn the letter up and stuffed it in her pocket. Late that afternoon she had gone down to the kitchen and told Cosette she was going out for a walk. "The weather's turned cold," Cosette had said. "Will you be warm enough in that?"

"Yes," Rachel had said. And she had gone out wearing the suede jacket, the jacket they had found her in, wet and soaking from the tide.

## CHAPTER XVI

I got some glue and paper from the desk in my room and pasted the scraps carefully on the page. I reread it again, still hoping I could glean a different interpretation. For there was Rachel's suicide note. Why would she write to Phillipe, *I can't go on with this. . . ? Forgive me. . .* What had she meant? It could not have had anything to do with Armand. She and Phillipe both felt the same about him and if Rachel planned to turn Armand into the authorities she would not have asked for Phillipe's forgiveness. Or if she had been murdered she would not have written it all. The most plausible explanation was that the note was a forgery. It had to be.

But it was not the note which concerned me now. It was the damning letter in my hand. I stood at the window staring out, wondering what to do. The sea was like molten lead caught by the rays of the late afternoon sun. Far out a sail-boat beat before the wind. It seemed to be headed for Boone Island, a tiny wooded islet some five miles across the water. I knew Boone Island well. No one lived there. It had a curving yellow sanded beach, one of the few on these islands, sheltered from the wind and Armand and I had often used it for picnics on fine summer days. We would set off at dawn in the *Caravelle*, the cook having packed us a sumptuous feast of cheese and cold chicken and brown gingerbread. We would sometimes pretend we were pirates searching for hidden gold and on those days a makeshift flag of skull and



crossbones would fly from the mast. One day we found a medallion, and though it was stamped 1939 NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR, I recall how it spurred us to a frenzy for the next hour, so certain were we that we had struck pay dirt.

There, at the window, I relived the past with a vividness that lanced my heart. Why did things have to change? Why couldn't we have remained as we were, caught, imprisoned, in those moments of time, happy, our little world inviolate?

I turned back to the room with a sigh. I would have to show the letter to Armand. Like Rachel I felt I must face him before I went to anyone else. Unlike her, however, I knew that I was taking a risk. If Armand had already killed two people why should he stop at me? Whatever love he once held for me was long gone, lost in bitter anger. Still I could see no other way.

When I got downstairs Cosette was coming out of the library with a tray of cups and saucers. "Here, let me take that," I said, relieving her of the tray. "You ought to be in bed."

"I'm all right," she said. "I get to thinking too much when I'm lying down."

She followed me into the kitchen. "Were you going out?" she asked.

"I'm going down to the Cove to see Armand." I set the tray down on the counter next to the dishwasher.

"He won't be there," she said. "He's gone."

"Gone? Did he say when he'd be back?"

"He isn't coming back." She began to stack the cups and saucers in the dishwasher.

"What do you mean . . . 'he isn't coming back'?"

"Just what I said. He's gone for good."

"When did he leave?"

"About an hour ago."

I felt as if the proverbial rug had been pulled from under my feet. "Didn't he leave a message?"

"No."

"But . . . why? Did he say why he was going?"

"He and Phillipe had a terrible fight. Phillipe told him to get out and never come back."

"Fight? What did they fight about?"

"Armand didn't say. Just brought back the pots and pans and the blanket he had borrowed from me and said what I told you. That's all I know."

It was not the first angry collision between Armand and Phillipe. But what had brought on this one? "Is Phillipe in the studio now?"

"Yes, but. . . ."

"I'm going up."

"He's working," said Cosette. "You'd better wait."

"I can't wait."

"Laura—take my advice. Don't mix in. Stay out of it. It hasn't anything to do with you."

"It has everything to do with me," I said.

"Let him go. He's a rolling stone."

"It's not only Armand. It's . . . it's Rachel."

"Rachel?" Her head swung around, her eyes surprised.

"I found something. I . . . I'd better talk to Phillipe." I turned to go.

She came across the room and clutched at my arm. "What did you find? Laura, tell me . . ."

"Later," I said, releasing her hand and heading for the door.

"Laura. . . ! Wait!"

"I'll tell you all about it later."

I climbed the winding stair to the turret and knocked on the studio door. There was no answer. I turned the knob and went in. Phillipe was standing at the window, his hands in his pockets. I could see his profile, his brow creased in a frown. For a moment I thought of closing the door and going back down to the kitchen and waiting as Cosette had advised. Phillipe could sometimes be a bear about intruders in the studio. He swung around impatiently. "What is it now?" And then seeing it was me, "Oh . . . Laura."

I could tell he was still angry. His mouth was hard, the nostrils white and pinched.

"I didn't want to disturb you," I began, "but I had to talk to you."

"If it's about Armand, save your breath, I've had it up to here with him." He held his hand up to his chin. "Enough is enough."

"What did he do?" I asked, coming into the room.

"What didn't he do? Loafing, hanging about. Insolent. The same old story. And his using my car whenever he damn well felt like it. Then he had the gall—would you believe it?—the gall to tell me he didn't think I would mind."

"He'd been driving your car?"

"It was the key business, Laura, that put me on to it. It never dawned on me, until you said that you had lost the keys and Armand was able to go into the garage and start the car without them, that he had been using it. And this morning I noticed a small dent in the left front fender. I asked him about it. He said he must have scraped it getting out of a tight parking place. . . . Oh, what's the difference!" He threw up his hands. "If it hadn't been that, it would have been something else. I told him to take the *Corvette* and get off the Island or I'd call the sheriff."

I did not say anything. It was as if I had been struck dumb. I was still wearing the raincoat I had put on to go out. The notepaper, folded neatly, was in the pocket. I felt its smoothness, the little rough edges of the bits of posted paper. Half of me was glad he and Armand had gone, the other half depressed because I knew I could not let things stand. I must tell Philippe. It would be wrong to remain silent. I must tell him everything. Philippe would call the sheriff, the police in Davenport, too. They would hunt Armand down. He was not a missing girl like Marilyn, one of thousands, but a criminal, a suspected murderer. They would find him, surely, no matter where he ran, where he hid. They would throw him in prison, cage him, and pound



head, those defiant eyes. Yet I must speak. Under similar circumstances Rachel would not have hesitated.

But I was not Rachel. I was Laura. I loved Armand. It was a sick, agonizing love, a fruitless love. But there it was, anyway, like an undigested stone in the pit of my stomach.

"What is it you wanted to talk to me about?" Phillipe asked.

"It can keep," I said. I couldn't tell him, not yet.

Cosette was still in the kitchen when I went down. She was beating something in a bowl with a whisk. "Did you see Phillipe?" she asked.

I nodded.

"What was it you had to show him?"

I took the paper from my pocket and gave it to her. She wiped her hands on her apron and held the paper out from her face. I watched her eyes closely, the expression on her face as she read. She turned to me with a puzzled look.

"Don't you see?" I said. "My mother had found out something about Armand, something that would have probably sent him to prison."

"And you think he . . . he killed Rachel?"

I was mute but she must have read the answer in my eyes. She gave the paper back to me. "You love him very much, don't you?"

"Yes."

She sighed, a deep, painful sigh. "I think I understand. Love, humpf! It's a funny thing, isn't it? How we can love impossible people. I loved Marlyn. What was she really?" She looked up at me. "I'm not the old fool you think I am. I wasn't blind, I saw Marlyn was not very much. But I loved her." She bit her lip. "Whether she loved me or not I don't know. If I was honest I could say that she used me, a home, security, whatever money I meant to leave her. But I loved her. God knows, I loved her." She stared down at the frothy mix in the bowl.

"What shall I do?" I asked.

"Do?"

"I must tell Phillipe. I couldn't a moment ago. But eventually I'm going to have to tell him."

She took up the whisk and began to beat the eggs again.

"Don't you agree?" I wanted to know.

Her hands were busy with the whisk. "Please, answer me. Don't you agree?" I repeated.

She rested the whisk against the side of the bowl. "Can you bring back the dead?"

"No."

"And you want my advice?"

"Yes."

"Leave it then."

"That doesn't help."

"Then you shouldn't have asked." She got up from the chair and went over to the stove and lit the gas under a saucepan.

"I have my conscience to wrestle with," I said.

She turned and looked at me, her mouth a grim line. "We all do."

"If only I could have talked to Armand before he left."

"If, if!" she exploded, her eyes ablaze. "Isn't there some kind of poem about that? If this, if that. The saddest words of tongue or pen. What's the use of it? Laura, you're trying to rearrange what's gone and done with. Forget it."

"How can you say that? I love Armand, but how can I shield a murderer?"

"So you've set yourself up as judge and jury and condemned him already?"

"No. . . ."

"If he's guilty, they'll find him sooner or later. They'll find him and they won't need your help. So put it out of your mind."

But I could not put it out of my mind. I could not throw the letter out. It weighed on me like a stone. I spent the night drifting in and out of tormented dreams and when morning came I still could not bring myself to show the letter to

Phillipe. Around ten o'clock I walked down to the Cove. A fine rain began to fall just as I got there. The *Caravelle* was gone, the empty pier swaying and creaking with the lap of the tide. I walked slowly up from it to the hut Armand had used for such a brief time. I paused in the doorway, looking around. There was an old dilapidated table, a stool, and a potbellied stove. Nothing else. Nothing to show that Armand had been there, but a crumpled paper bag on the zinc sinkboard, and a plastic milk container.

I went in and shut the door. I had thought that the cottage would be damp and chill. But it wasn't. Warmth seemed to emanate from the stove. I opened the little iron door and to my amazement saw that the ashes were alive with a red glow. Any fire that Armand had built should have been completely dead by now. These ashes were from a recent fire, a fire not more than a few hours old. It gave me a queer feeling, that smouldering fire, as if my presence was shared by another.

I could hear the rain pattering upon the roof, tapping at the windows. I looked around again, my eyes sliding across the floor and into the empty corners, pausing at the door which led to the other room. It was partially open, but all I could see was the corner of a brass bedstead. I stood there staring at it, eyes and ears straining, wondering, afraid that someone might be beyond that door watching me, staring at me. There was nothing but the sound of the rain and the water dripping from the rusted gutters outside.

I went to the door and opened it wider, the creaking hinges scraping along my nerves. There was an unrolled sleeping bag on the dusty, exposed springs. Armand's? I could not tell. It was army surplus, khaki colored as Armand's had been, but then there were thousands like it. The room was small and dreary. Its walls, once painted blue, were spotted with mold. The window, the one that had been blown out by the storm, was patched with dark cardboard. There was no sign that the room was lived in, except for the sleeping bag. Had Armand forgotten it? Or was he still on



the Island? I did not see how that was possible since the *Caravelle* was gone. Fisherman's Cove and the small bay at the foot of Storm House were the only two places that would take the *Caravelle's* deep draft. Yet he might have sailed it to the mainland or to another island and returned in a dinghy or rowboat. A smaller boat could easily be hidden along the rocky beaches. One would never know he had come back. I had a sudden hope, mingled with a queer, tingling fear, that this was what he had done.

I walked back along the shore path to the house, the gentle rain wetting my face, wondering if I was as mad, as insane as Armand. By not revealing what I knew, what I suspected, I was not only obstructing justice but joining in silent, secret complicity with Armand, a man who may have committed more than one serious crime.

My stubborn, ill advised silence was abruptly broken that night. Unable to sleep I remained in the library reading long after the others had gone to bed. Around twelve, feeling drowsy, I finally shut the book and went upstairs. The moment I started down the corridor, shadowed and dim at this hour, I knew something was wrong. I saw nothing, heard nothing, but the eerie feeling was there, seeping into my blood like the chill damp air. I wanted to cry out for Phillipe, as I had once shouted for Rachel in the midst of a child's nightmare, but shame kept me mute.

The door to my room was open. There was blackness within, the unseen stir of a cold draft. I gritted my teeth and forced myself to step across the threshold. I stumbled, falling face down on to something soft and unyielding. I think I screamed. I don't remember. I cannot even recall to this day how long I lay sprawled there before I realized that the thing under me was a body.

I sprang to my feet. Whimpering with fear, my hand trembling, I found the light switch. It was Phillipe. He was on his side, one arm flung out, his face white as paper. As I stared at him, he began to groan.

Cosette helped me get Phillipe to his room. By the time we had his slippers off and a cold compress on his head he was fully conscious. "That's quite a lump you have there," Cosette said. "I'd better go down and get the ice bag."

When she had gone I said, "You gave me a scare. What happened?"

He pushed himself up on the pillows. "I don't know exactly. I was at my desk going over the accounts when I thought I heard a noise in the corridor." He took a sip of water from the glass on the table beside him. "I went out. No one was there. I thought I'd knock on your door to see if you were all right. There wasn't an answer, so I opened the door and stepped in—and then, wham!" He gingerly felt of the lump under the towel on his head.

"Someone hit you with a vase." I had found the broken shards scattered over the floor. "Have you any idea who it was?"

"None." He made a wry face and then half jokingly. "Unless it was Armand come back to 'clip me one' as he once threatened to do."

"It may have been him," I said. "I don't think he has left the Island." I had to tell him then about the cottage in Fisherman's Cove.

"I might have known he'd still be hanging around. I wonder if he's mixed up in something."

There was a small silence while I wrestled with guilt, love, conscience, the painful torment of a decision. "There's something else I found," I said at last. "It's in my room. I'll be back in a minute."

I got the letter and for a moment was tempted to set a match to it, reduce those condemning words to ashes. But the sight of the broken vase still lying on the floor sent me back to Phillipe's room with the paper in my hand. Cosette was there, adjusting the ice bag on Phillipe's sore head. "Let him get some rest," she said to me, her eyes going to my

hand. "Can't it wait until tomorrow?"

"It's all right," said Phillipe. "I hurt, but I'm not that tired."

Cosette threw me a disdainful look as she passed me on her way from the room.

I handed Phillipe the letter. "Get me my glasses, will you? Over there on the desk."

He took the glasses from me and slipped them on. The fine lines on his forehead deepened as he read. "So this is why Rachel wrote to Barry."

"I . . . I think so. She must have discovered that Armand was involved in something . . . something. . . ."

"Criminal?"

"Yes. It's only a guess. I've no idea what it might be."

"Have you called Barry about this discovery of yours?"

"I . . . I thought you should see it first."

"Yes . . . yes. I wish I had learned about this before Armand left."

"I . . . when I found it he had already gone."

"Hmmm." He studied the paper again.

"Phillipe . . ." I began. "Phillipe . . . do you think that Armand might have. . . ?"

He looked up, his eyebrows raised.

I wet my lips. "Do you think that when Rachel told him she was going to the police he . . . he might have. . . ?" I couldn't finish.

Phillipe kept staring at me, puzzled, then slow, dawning comprehension stained his cheeks. "That he might have killed your mother?"

I nodded mutely.

The red deepened. He clenched his fist. "If I thought for a moment . . . I'd . . . why I'd kill him myself! Scum! Ungrateful scum! After all Rachel did for him."

"It's just a supposition," I said hastily, coming to Armand's defense as if to make up for my betrayal. "If he had, he wouldn't have stayed on at Storm House, don't you think?"



"He was always unstable," Phillipe said. "I had the feeling he'd come to violence someday."

"There's the suicide note . . ." I said.

He wasn't listening. "I should never have taken him back. I should have told him to go on his way. I'm stupid. A stupid, trusting idiot. I should have known he meant trouble. He was always causing trouble. He . . ." Suddenly Phillipe doubled over, clutching at his stomach.

"What is it?" I got up from my chair. "What is it?"

He shook his head. "It's the ulcer. The damn ulcer. Be a good girl and get me the Gelusil in the bathroom."

I did as he asked. He popped one of the white tablets in his mouth and then another. "I've upset you," I said. "I should have waited."

"I'll survive the ulcer. I've lived with it too long. But this. . . ."

"We might be wrong," I argued. "The letter doesn't prove murder. Only that Armand was doing something illegal."

"Well, we'll soon find out. First thing in the morning I'll go over to Daveport myself and see the police. They'll catch up with him. And we'll drag it out. The whole rotten business."

The decisions now belonged to others. Why didn't I feel relieved? I had satisfied my conscience, hadn't I? I had done my "duty" as Rachel had taught me to do. But the stone in my heart grew heavier and I felt a burning behind my eyes. The feel of those unshed tears took me back to the time I had gone hunting pheasant with a male companion. I had never been hunting; hunting had not appealed to me. But I was infatuated with this man, still in the first stages when to be near him was exciting. I remember him putting the gun in my hand, pointing to a blur of color as it flew up from the underbrush. I felt the kick of the rifle, heard the echo of the shot. A few minutes later the spotted retriever laid the bird, its gaudy plumage already beginning to lose its metallic sheen, at my feet. It was dead and I had killed it, and the same tears burned in my eyes now as they did then.

"Do you see what your mother tried to save you from?" Phillipe was saying. "Do you understand why she had to send you away?"

It was a question I had heard many times before. I could not give him an answer. I got up from my chair again and went across the room to the door, blindly groping for the knob. "You did well in coming to me, Laura . . ."

My back to Phillipe, I nodded without speaking.

Once in my room I threw myself on the bed and, burying my head in the pillow, I cried as I had never cried before.

## CHAPTER XVII

Phillipe, over Cosette's voluble protest, left early the next morning for Daveport. I was glad he had not asked me to go. I don't think I could have faced that brisk, young officer's questions without feeling like a criminal, the lowest kind of paid informer.

It was a long, interminable morning and when Phillipe finally returned at one o'clock I was waiting for him on the terrace. I went to meet him as he walked up from the dock. "We've held lunch for you," I said.

He looked tired, his face lined with pain, his eyes puffy with fatigue. "I'm not hungry," he said. "Tell the others to go ahead and then come into the library."

When I got back to the library he was standing at the window, his back to me. I shut the door and he turned around. "They weren't wildly excited about my news."

"You shouldn't have gone," I said. "You're not well."

"No. I wanted to go. It was my place to go." He came and sat down beside me on the sofa. "They did not seem to think much of our theory that Armand was responsible for Rachel's death. And after I had a chance to cool down I wasn't too sure about it myself. The trouble is the letter is too scrappy—inconclusive. We don't even know for sure *what* Armand did. I couldn't give the police any kind of information, only guesses, and those were pretty vague. I couldn't tell them whether he was involved in the sale of drugs, had



committed a robbery, larceny or fraud. I could not even tell them that he had stolen anything from me. The *Caravelle* was his and that seems to be the only thing he took from the Island." He paused and lit a cigarette. His hands, I saw, were shaking.

"Incidentally," he went on, "the *Caravelle* was at the pier when I got over to Doryville this morning. Clem Barker happened to be there and I asked him if he had seen Armand."

"Had he?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact he and Armand both caught the Boston bus day before yesterday. Clem got off at Blue Hill and Armand went on to Boston."

"Then . . . that fire in the stove at the cottage must have been made by someone else. A lobsterman, maybe, who couldn't make it back in the fog and spent the night."

"Or a thief," Phillipe said. "You're forgetting I was conked over the head last night. I must have surprised him in your room. Did you happen to notice if anything was missing?"

"No. I didn't think to look. I can run up now."

"Would you?"

"What about Rachel's room?"

He ran his hand through his hair. "I wouldn't begin to know what's supposed to be there. Her expensive jewelry was sold and her good furs are still in storage. I'll have Co-sette check out the rest of the house later. I might have scared him off before he had a chance to get anything."

"I'll have a look, anyway."

There was something of mine missing. A pair of pearl earrings and a pearl ring. Phillipe, when I told him, said, "I'll have to get the dogs again. I can't see any other way, unless it was Armand doubling back. . . ."

"If it was Armand he wouldn't steal a pair of earrings." In all my worst imaginings I could not see Armand as a petty thief.

"Maybe not. Anyway I discussed it with the police. They

said the best they could do was bring Armand in on a vagrancy charge. They'd try to question him then. I had brought an old photo along and they were going to run a check. I couldn't give them any idea of where he might have gone. He's probably miles from here by now."

Traveling. On the bus to Boston with the duffel bag and the sleeping roll. And from there, where?

"I don't know," said Phillipe, mashing out his cigarette. "I just don't know what to think anymore. I only wish that I had not been up in that damned studio that day. If I could have spoken to Rachel. . . ." He turned to me. "This has been doubly hard for you, Laura. I don't want you to think I'm totally wrapped up in my own misery. I know how your feelings are involved in this. I realize what a shock that letter must have been to you, and how difficult it was for you to show it to me."

"But . . . but, as the police say, it doesn't *prove* anything." Had I woven a fantastic web of crime and murder around a few fragments, a few words that had an innocent meaning when read in context?

"True. And it shouldn't change your plans, Laura. It might take weeks, months before they find Armand. They may never find him. If they do and you are needed for testimony or whatever you can always come back."

"Yes," I said. I knew that letter would always remain a puzzle. I would never see Armand again. "Yes, I can."

We sat for a few minutes without speaking. The fire I had built in the morning stirred on the hearth, the logs settling in a shower of sparks. I watched as the embers winked out one by one. The end. Finished.

"I'll call and try to get a plane reservation as soon as they can give me one."

Suddenly, desperately I wanted to be away from Storm House, a half world away. I wished I could get up and walk out the door at that very moment and leave it all behind. "In fact I'll do it right now."

I went to the telephone and put in a call to Boston. Phillipe said, as I was waiting, "I'll drive you down whenever you're ready."

"Thank you." On the phone, a young female voice answered. I told her what I wanted. "Sorry," she informed me, "we aren't taking any reservations until the strike is over."

"Strike?" I echoed stupidly. What strike? I hadn't heard. I didn't know. The isolation of Storm House had never struck me so completely as it did then. The events of the world, the world of reality, the world where people met and decided fates, where riots and floods and celebrations took place where babies were born and old men died, seemed to be on another planet.

"... but I'll take your name and phone number and call you at the first available space," the voice was saying.

I gave her the information and hung up. "They're on strike," I said to Phillipe. "They're not taking any reservations."

"Can't be helped. I don't imagine the strike will last too long."

Later when I spoke to Cosette about my attempt to get a flight back to Paris, she said, "Why don't you go down to Boston, anyway? You know how those ticket people are. The first ones there after the strike will be the first served. You might have to spend a night or two in a hotel, but at least you'd be there."

"Sounds like you're trying to get rid of me," I said.

"I am. It doesn't help my mood to see you down at the mouth."

"Does it show?" A kind of dispirited lethargy had taken hold of me. The weather had turned sullen and windy, the cold eating at my bones. My first impetus to leave had somehow stalled. I felt as if I were moving around in a void, my arms and legs weighted with heavy bags of sand. "I wonder," I said, "if I was ever meant to leave Storm House."

She gave me a startled look. "Now you're talking like me."



"That's not a very sensible thing to say. Not for you, Laura."

"I suppose not," I agreed.

I went to bed with a book at half past nine and read until eleven-thirty when, drowsy, I switched off the lamp. As soon as I settled down among the pillows I no longer felt sleepy. My eyes, drooping only a moment before, were wide now. I stared at my small traveling clock with its luminous dial, watching the hands slowly inch their way around: eleven-thirty-five, eleven-thirty-eight, eleven-forty. I tried to calculate what time it would be in Paris. The clock in my apartment there sat on the mantel. It was an old bronze table clock I had picked up at an auction, very cheaply, since its authenticity as a genuine antique was in question. The hands would be stopped, of course. There had been nobody to wind it. I wondered if I should ever wind it again, hear its deep rasping tick. I could not help what I had said to Cosette about my never leaving Storm House. I could not shake the awful feeling that something terrible was yet to happen. That everything so far had been leading up to it.

The north wind, increasing its ugly temper by the minute, shook the windows. I heard it moaning and rocketing above the roar and pounding of the surf. Without turning on the light I got up and parted the curtains. A pale hazed moon rode the night clouds, emerging now and then to shine down in brilliance on the tumultuous water below. It was a wild, savage scene, as if the powers of evil were loose, rioting triumphantly free. In the distance I heard the dogs bark. For, true to his word, Phillipe had the kennel return the mastiffs that afternoon. Now, like the wind, they were roaming the Island. I shivered in a sudden cold draft, and hearing a slight noise behind, turned.

The door was opened wide. It had opened without a sound. I stood staring into the blackness beyond, a cold vise squeezing the breath from my lungs. The seconds ticked past, each a pulse throbbing in the emptiness of time. The form did not take shape slowly as it had done before. It just appeared. One moment there was inky nothingness and then

next a hooded, luminous figure. My knees trembling, fighting panic, I clutched at the curtains. I thought I would suffocate from the painful lurching of my heart. I understood then how a ghost could murder, how its malevolent appearance could thrust a killing fear, like a sharp dagger, into the heart.

It began to move slowly away, back into the corridor. I don't know what I should have done had it come into the room. Unlike the first time I had seen Mignon's ghost I did not scream. I could not utter a sound.

It was gone. I wrenched myself into motion and staggered across the room. I looked out into the passageway. The luminescence had vanished, but I could make out the white cape walking toward the stairs.

Not floating. Walking. And there was something about that walk which ticked at my memory. No ethereal glow, and a vaguely familiar walk. It was not Mignon's ghost. It was not any kind of ghost. The eerie figure which had frightened me half to death was no more a spirit from the world of the dead than I.

I saw the caped figure pause on the landing. The next moment it began to descend the stairs. I followed, keeping to the shadows, my feet treading softly on the carpet. It had reached the bottom. I hung back watching as it turned into the dining room, then I went quickly down the stairs. I reached the kitchen in time to hear the closing of the door which led to the servant's quarters. It had gone on to Cosette's room. Was that the routine, I wondered? First to appear at my door and then at Cosette's? I could not blame her now for her fright. We were the only two who had seen the "ghost," the only two who had expressed doubt of Rachel's suicide. Could our suspicions be the cause for this masquerade, this attempt to frighten us from the house?

I went silently across the kitchen and through the passageway, stealing along it until I came to Cosette's room. Below me I could hear the steady throb of the generator. I inched



the door open. From the heap of bedclothes and the angle at which I stood, it appeared that Cosette was sleeping. She had fallen asleep with the lamp still on. I pressed the door a little wider and I heard a gasp. Before I could move the door was wrenched from my hand.

I found myself looking into Cosette's icy gray eyes.

She was still wearing the cape, the hood thrown back on her shoulders. We stared at each other, frozen in shock. It was as if a time bomb had gone off and in its first blinding explosion we had lost the power of movement and speech.

"Cosette. . . ? You?" I was the first to speak.

She sighed wearily, turning from me. "Why. . . ?" I said. "What. . . ?" A thousand questions rose to my tongue.

She began to unbutton the cape. It had been painted over with a white fluorescent paint. I could see thin patches of beige where the color had not quite taken. "Why?" I repeated.

"I wanted to scare you," she said. "That was all."

"You wanted to scare me? But why. . . why?"

"Because you wouldn't leave. Because you kept putting it off and off."

"Why was it so important to you that I leave?" She bit her lip and removed the cape, laying it on the bed. "Is my presence that obnoxious?"

"Laura, you know that isn't the reason. You know that I'm fond of you, but. . . ." She sat down on the bed, clasping her hands in her lap.

"But what?" I asked impatiently.

"How can I tell you?" She looked up at me, her eyes appealing. "How can I make you understand? Laura, this place is dangerous for you. I'm afraid for you."

"Afraid of what? And please—Cosette, don't tell me that death comes in threes."

She did not answer. I grabbed hold of her hands. "You know something. You haven't told me everything. What is it you're hiding?"



"You ask too many questions."

"Haven't I the right to? Just awhile ago you succeeded in scaring me out of my wits."

"It was for your own good." She turned her face from me. She seemed to have aged even more since I had come back to Storm House, grown thinner, more shrunken.

"It's about my mother, isn't it?" I asked. The generator below went off and in the silence my words echoed in the room. "You know she was murdered," I went on. Her head averted, she remained mute. "And you know who did it. You don't want me to find out."

She sat like a statue, silent, immobile.

"Was it you?" Anger and frustration had wrung the words from me.

She swung her head around, her agonized eyes piercing me to the marrow. "How can you say such a thing," she whispered hoarsely. "How could you even think it?"

I went to the dresser and sat down on the stool. "I don't know," I said, staring at the carpet. "It just came out. The night of the storm when we were in Mother's room you said she was murdered. Then you took it back. . . ."

"I didn't want you going around asking foolish questions. And when you found that letter. . . ."

My head shot up. "Was it Armand?"

"Go away, Laura. Nothing you can do will bring Rachel back."

"And let a murderer go free?"

"There is a justice, Laura, whatever you may believe. The murderer won't go free."

"Justice is here, not in the hereafter. It isn't right for you to shield a murderer."

"I'm only shielding you."

"And you won't tell me?"

She shook her head. Silence stretched between us. "You were awfully good in that disguise," I said. And then after a moment, "It was you who knocked Phillips over the head with a vase the other night, wasn't it?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because it was around midnight. Mignon's usual witching hour. And he almost caught you outside my door."

"It was an accident. I . . . yes, you're right. When he came out into the corridor I ducked into your room. I don't know how it happened. I had the vase in my hand. I . . . I panicked, I guess, when he came through the door. I didn't hit him very hard."

"Enough to knock him out. And then you took my earrings, the ring. . . ."

"I was going to mail them to you once you got back to Paris. I don't know why I did it, except at the moment I didn't feel that I could tell Phillipe I was responsible for the lump on his head. And—Laura, I'd appreciate it if you kept this whole thing between us a secret."

"Why should I keep it a secret when you won't share yours with me?"

She stared at me for a long moment. "No. Tell him then, if that's what you want."

She knew that I wouldn't. We fell into another silence. Suddenly it was broken by a loud thump below, then another. "There's someone down there," I said listening.

The generator started up again. Only it didn't sound like the generator. This was a funny, clanking sound. Steady, like the beat of chains against a wall. "What's that?" I asked.

Cosette's face had gone very white. "The generator," she said.

"No, . . . no, I'm sure it isn't." I got to my feet.

"Go away, Laura." She rose and put her hand out. "Please . . . do as I say."

"I'm going down to see." I walked to the door.

"No. You mustn't. I put on a cape and a hood. A pretend thing. But Mignon . . . I've seen the *real* Mignon . . . and she . . . she's horrible. She died in chains down there."

"I don't believe in Mignon, anymore, not after tonight." I went through the door and she followed. "You don't have to come."

"I can't let you go alone."

We came into the kitchen. The sounds were very faint there. I opened the cellar door and the moldy earth smell swirled upward. My hand found the switch and light bloomed in the darkness. I could feel Cosette trembling beside me. Slowly we went down the stairs. The clank-clank was more audible now, a definite, rhythmic beat, as if someone were striking the stone walls of a cell with chained wrists. Someone gone mad, the timed beat—one, two, three—the chant of a deranged mind.

I clicked on the switch at the bottom of the stairs. The light cast long shadows on the sweating stones. With Cosette at my heels I began to steal along the dank passageway following the sound. It seemed as I passed the heavy dungeon doors, bright greedy eyes were watching us from behind each slitted peephole. The clanking grew louder, stronger, a ringing echo of iron upon iron.

Abruptly, it stopped. The wind gathered up the ensuing silence in a weary, shuddering sigh.

"Mignon!" Cosette whispered hoarsely in my ear.

"No," I hissed angrily, "it's only the wind." My bravery was a fraud. It was one thing to be brash and skeptical upstairs with the rosy lamplight mirrored above the bureau and falling across the tousled bed, and another to be standing here in the swinging eerie light of shimmering spider webs, the dark, looming shadows ringed about us. Only Cosette's presence and my pride kept me from retreating back to the safety of the kitchen.

The sigh came again and I could feel Cosette's nails digging into my arm. That sigh was so human, so full of pain and sorrow, it tore the last rag-tag remnant of my skepticism to shreds. What if Cosette was right? In my mind's eye I saw Mignon shackled, chained to the wall, her hood thrown back from her matted hair, the eyes hollows of mad despair. To look into them would be like looking into the very pit of hell.



Another moaning sigh brought me to a halt. Cosette's hand was like an icy claw. Why was I here? What foolishness had prompted me, like some brainless, fictional heroine, to go prowling in a place of the dead? I did not like it. Cosette had spoken the truth.

I turned to go back and as I did I heard the murmur of a voice, a man's voice. "Wait!" I whispered to Cosette. The voice again, a voice I should know. I went forward again, tracking that murmuring voice with my ears. I rounded a corner and saw a bar of light under the second door.

"Pretty good, pretty damn good, I'd say." It was Kyle.

"Beautiful!" A woman spoke. Shirley.

I pushed open the door.

Shirley and Kyle were at a table under the bright blue light of a fluorescent lamp. Another man stood behind the light. He wore an eyeshade. I couldn't see his face. On top of the table was an apparatus that looked like a small printing press. The clank-clank sound. Of course. A silly printing press, and I had thought of ghosts and madmen chained to walls. The sudden relief left me light headed and I giggled.

"Well, for goodness sake," I said. "Are you folks putting out an underground newspaper." I thought my pun very clever, very funny. But no one smiled, no one laughed. They all stared at me, even the man whose face I could not see.

I tittered again, a nervous simpering sound. "Or are you printing five dollar bills?"

Shirley uttered a little cry and put her hand to her mouth. Something was wrong, very wrong, and yet I could not erase that smirk from my face. I took a step into the room. Nobody spoke, nobody moved. "Have I interrupted something important?"

Kyle started to speak, but the man silenced him with a curt wave of his hand. He removed his eyeshade and came around the table.

"Phillipe!" His face was like chalk. "Have I done something wrong?" I asked, a tremor creeping into my voice.

He did not answer. My eyes moved to a box on the chair beside the press. It was an ordinary brown carton. HER-TER'S CHILI AND BEANS was stamped on the side. Even from where I stood I could see what the box held. It was filled to the brim with neat stacks of rubber banded bills. Five dollar bills.

## CHAPTER XVIII

I looked from the box to Phillipe, dazed, not understanding.

"You might as well come in too, Cosette," Phillipe said in a tired voice. She came and stood beside me. I did not look at her.

"Christ!" Shirley exclaimed. "I was afraid this would happen. What are we going to do?"

"Yes, what are we going to do?" Kyle asked anxiously. "I told you we'd better wait. Now. . . ."

"I'll handle it," said Phillipe, running his hand through his hair. "Let's not get excited. I'll take care of it."

"What? How? Do something that will get the agents down on our heads?" There was a red flush to Kyle's face, a nervous quiver to his lips.

I stared at the box, the green bills, all new and crisp. It was not play money.

"I told you I would handle it," said Phillipe. His face looked gaunt in the harsh light. "Quietly and without a fuss."

It was counterfeit money. They were forgers. Kyle and Shirley—and Phillipe. All three of them manufacturing false money in the cellar of Storm House. Kyle's champagne and Shirley's mink. But Phillipe. . . ?

"Cosette," said Phillipe, "did you know?"

"No," answered Cosette. "I didn't." There was shock and



incomprehension on her face and I knew she was telling the truth.

"Can I trust you not to inform?" Phillipe asked her.

"I've never been an informer."

Kyle made an impatient gesture. "Are you going to take her word for it? Of course she'll run right to the police."

Phillipe's eyes blazed. "You stupid ass! Don't you think I know what I'm doing? Cosette is a Legrum. Her family have been trusted servants to the Tourands for centuries. Not even during the Revolution did they betray that trust. It's a point of honor. Something you wouldn't understand."

"And what about her?" Kyle pointed to me. "She's not a Legrum."

"I'll take care of it." Phillipe turned to me. "Come upstairs, Laura."

"No!" Cosette thrust herself between Phillipe and me. "You're not to harm her."

"I won't harm her," said Phillipe.

"I'm coming with you," Cosette said.

"I think it would be better if you stayed," said Phillipe.

"This is a matter that doesn't concern you."

"I won't let her go," said Cosette.

Kyle came forward. "What did I tell you?"

Phillipe looked from Kyle to Cosette. "All right, Kyle, you'd better keep her here."

Kyle took hold of Cosette. "I'm sorry, Cosette," Phillipe said. "But everything will work out. You'll see." He took my arm. I was like someone who had been a chance witness to a bad accident, watching a remote chain of events over which I had no control take place. None of it seemed real—the bright blue fluorescent light, the table and the printing press, the chili bean carton.

We left and went down the passageway and up the cellar stairs in silence. We did not speak until we had reached Phillipe's room and he shut the door. "Now," he said, "will you please tell me how you got to the cellar in the middle of the night?"

"I was in Cosette's room when we heard. . . ."

"Cosette's room?" he interrupted.

"Yes." I began then from the time Cosette had appeared at my door disguised as Mignon's ghost and told him how I had followed her down to her room.

"Why in the world was she got up as a ghost?" Phillipe asked.

"She wanted to scare me. She wanted me to leave."

"Did she say why?"

"No . . . no, not exactly. She said that it was dangerous for me to stay. I was asking too many questions about . . . about Rachel."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. I . . . I'm sure she didn't know about the printing press," I added.

"And you?"

"No. I had no idea."

"Maybe we should have waited, but I needed the money. And we had waited so long. . . ." He looked at me. "It comes as a shock to you doesn't it, my printing money."

I nodded mutely.

He sighed and sat down on a chair. He lit a cigarette and threw the match into the wastebasket. "I'm sorry you had to find out, Laura."

"I . . . I wish I hadn't," I said miserably. "I don't understand how . . . how. . . ."

"How I could do such a thing? I don't like being poor. It's that simple."

"But you told . . . you said you didn't mind, that you made enough to get along on. That it was Rachel. . . ."

"No, my dear. Actually it was the other way around. You see it was I, not Rachel who could not face a life of penury. Yes, it's true. Naturally Rachel was upset when she learned all her money was gone. Angry and upset, and depressed, too. But she was tough, very tough. Really a remarkable woman."

He sat watching the end of his cigarette for a moment, a

spasm of pain crossing his face. "I had gotten used to living the good life, you see. Fine wines, hand tailored suits, a smoothly run house, expensive cars. I suppose if I had never had them in the first place I might not have missed them. But I did have them and I wanted it to go on that way. I saw no reason why it shouldn't." He stubbed out his cigarette and lit another one.

I sat stiffly on the edge of the bed with my hands in my lap. The wind was still blowing hard. I could hear the shutter banging in the alcove. That same shutter. I had meant to tell Bob about it and I had forgotten. The sound of it jarred in my head.

"I've always had a good deal of talent," Phillipe was saying. "A talent which brought me little material reward. I should have been a dauber, one of those so-called artists who splash their canvases willy-nilly with paint, giving them ridiculous names, and then selling them at exorbitant prices. I was born a hundred years too late, I guess." He winced at the smoke curling up from his fingers. "I was never bitter about it, though. I loved painting and as long as I could afford to do what I wanted it didn't matter. I had money. People look up to money, you know. A good name means very little. Money is what counts. And then when it was gone," he flicked the ash from his cigarette. "I decided to turn my talent to making money. Literally. Don't you think that was clever of me?" He smiled, his eyes searching my face for an answer.

Dismayed, at a loss, I said, "I . . . I thought that one had to be an engraver. . . ."

He laughed. "My dear, engraving went out with high-buttoned shoes. Photography is used now. It's so much simpler. A picture is taken of the bill, then developed on a small plate and etched with acid. It's the details that take the skill. The little lines, the clearness of the central portrait and so on." He paused. "I find it very intriguing. Kyle is the one who gave me the idea, though he has nothing to do with



manufacture. I do all the reproductions." There was pride in his voice. It sickened me.

"Aren't you afraid that sooner or later those bills will be spotted as forgeries?" I couldn't help asking.

"Some of them may have been, for all I know. But none of us, Shirley, Kyle or myself have ever passed one. We don't have to take that risk. We just sell them in quantity to a man who has no idea where they come from. We have been careful, very careful on that score. The wholesaler has his runner, the runner has his sellers, and at the bottom of the ladder are the passers. We have nothing to do with any of them. So you see we are quite safe." It was said with a smug conceit I would have never thought Phillipe capable of. That, more than anything he had told me, touched a living nerve, like a bad tooth biting into ice.

"It's criminal, illegal. . . !" I burst out.

He shook his head sadly. "Those were Rachel's exact words."

"Then she found out?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I was sorry about that, just as sorry as I am about you."

I could see why she was depressed. Rachel, my mother, who lived by the rule, discovering her husband was a forger.

"She found out and she wanted me to go to the authorities and confess, 'to take your punishment,' she said. She was sure that if I made this appeal and threw myself on the mercy of the judge I would only get a reprimand, a rap on the knuckles, so to speak, a lecture to be a good boy. You can see how foolish that was, can't you, Laura, how she gave me no option?"

I didn't answer. With a sudden, terrible clarity I saw my mistake. The picture I had formed earlier had been a hasty, false one. The dark central character—the killer—had not been Armand, but Phillipe. Phillipe worried, Phillipe saying, "She committed suicide," the thin, black stem of the paint brush snapping in his hand. Phillipe driving, the reflected

image of the autumnal trees passing along the windshield, "I wonder if I shouldn't talk to Sheriff Cook about . . . Barry's letter?" Clever Phillipe.

"What did you do?" I whispered.

He looked at me out of sad, sorrowful eyes. "I loved your mother. I loved her through the years despite that moral blind spot of hers. I loved her because she was generous, because she gave me all the affection and caring I could ever hope to have from any woman. She gave me. . . ." He broke off, his face contorted for a moment. ". . . but in her way she had corrupted me, you see. I loved Rachel, but I loved the easy life she had brought to me, more."

"You killed her," I said dully.

"I . . . I had to, Laura."

And I had thought it was Armand. I had tortured myself needlessly. All those hours, all those days. I had accused him, sending Phillipe to the police to hunt him down. "Armand. . . . They will find Armand and think it was him."

"Rest easy on that, Laura. I lied to you. I never went to the police with that letter. Garbled as it was they might have suspected me, too. My name was there along with Armand's, as you remember."

I remembered. All too well. How could I forget? *I have faced him with it*, Rachel had written. It was Phillipe she had faced, it was Phillipe to whom she had given her ultimatum. Not Armand. How could I have been so obtuse, so dense? If I loved Armand, how could I have been so quick to condemn him? In my mind I saw his dark, handsome face carved in stone, his eyes accusing and bitter. Whatever else he had done, was doing, he was not Rachel's murderer.

"No one knew, you see. None of them suspected. Not Shirley or Kyle—or even Cosette."

Had Cosette known? She had warned me, "It will only cause you pain." Was she thinking of Armand—or Phillipe?

". . . and Marlyn was blackmailing me. Though not because of Rachel. You see, she was forever prowling around at night in that Hollywood negligee of hers, trying to seduce



me. Ridiculous. But one night she followed me down to the cellar. She did not want money. She wanted to marry me. Can you imagine?"

I said nothing. I thought of Marlyn with her silky blonde hair tapping at Phillipe's door in her brazen nightgown. Marlyn's brashness turned to fear, riding the mail boat. Marlyn sitting in the Daveport library through the long afternoon, her fearful eyes going to the door each time it opened.

"I did not like to do it. But she gave me no choice." Phillipe shook another cigarette from the pack. "I was sorry about Marlyn." I wondered if Cosette knew, if she had guessed. "But not half as sorry as I was—am—about Rachel." He searched in his pocket for a match. "I . . . that was a terrible day for me. The worst of my life. I won't forget it for a long time."

Terrible for him. Phillipe whose talent was never appreciated. Phillipe who wanted the easy life.

"Laura—I want you to understand. . . ."

"Why?" I said impassively. "What difference does it make? Your telling me all this." I had once wanted to know how my mother had spent her last day. I knew now and I didn't want to hear anymore.

"I want you to understand. I . . . I have to tell someone."

Confession was good for the soul. Phillipe had to unburden himself. Phillipe was trying to rid himself of Rachel's ghost.

"I'd rather not. . . ."

"I was locked in my studio all day," he went on. "I was there all right. But I wasn't painting. That was the last thing on my mind. Rachel had told me that she was going to call Barry when he returned from his trial in Poughkeepsie. I did not know about the letter she had written him, nor the one she had tried to write you. I was to sweat over them later. But on that day I knew I had to do something and fast. I stood by the window, I remember, smoking one cigarette after another. I must have smoked close to four packs that day. Around five I saw Rachel come out of the house. . . ."



It seemed to me, as Phillipe spoke, that I was there, too, high up in the turret, looking past his shoulder down at the whole of the Island. I, like Phillipe, saw Rachel in her brown suede jacket emerge from the house.

"I knew that she sometimes took a walk to Cliff's Edge in the late afternoon. I slipped out of the door, locking it behind me." He took out a large handkerchief and mopped his brow. "I . . . I don't think I meant to kill her . . . not then. I had no plan in mind. I wanted to talk to her again, perhaps threaten her—with what I don't know. As I started down the stairs, Shirley came in the front door. She went directly into the library without seeing me. No one saw me. If someone had, maybe. . . ."

Cosette? Had she seen Phillipe? Cosette whose honor forbade her to speak.

"Rachel was standing there, her back to me. . . ." He got up and opened a drawer and rummaging through it brought out a match folder. He lit his cigarette, his hands shaking badly. "She turned at the last minute. That look on her face. It still haunts me." He sat down again. "The note, the suicide note. I forged it. It wasn't hard."

No. It wasn't hard. Phillipe was a skillful forger. He had an eye for detail.

I watched him as he sat staring at the end of his cigarette. He had a slight tic under his left eye I had never noticed before. Every few seconds the tiny muscle would jump. It gave his face a weak look. I tried to hate him, but all I could feel was an overwhelming disgust.

"Why have you told me all this?" I asked.

"I didn't want you to stay. I was afraid something like this might happen. From the first I advised you to go back to Paris and when you wouldn't, I tried to persuade you. You were beginning to ask embarrassing questions."

The boulder, the dogs, the stalking hunter in the wood. I had almost forgotten. Phillipe could watch me from his turret, follow me with his eyes. He could leave the studio anytime without anyone being the wiser.

"Armand was here, too. Didn't his presence worry you?"

"Armand," Phillipe said in disgust. "All he cared about was getting a free meal and fooling with the *Caravelle*. He wasn't like you, doubting Rachel's suicide. Besides I knew I could get rid of him anytime I wanted. Not like you."

"A guest who overstayed her leave," I said bitterly.

"It's unfortunate. If you had come a month, two months from now. . . ." He got up and looked at me. "What am I to do?"

A cold wind blew across my heart. Phillipe may have been weak, self-indulgent, self-pitying. But he was also a murderer. He had already killed two people. "Death always comes in threes," Cosette had said.

"Haven't you done enough?" I said. A little pulse began to throb at the base of my throat.

"It . . . it does pose a problem." He stood facing me, staring into my eyes for a long time. Finally he said, "Like mother, like daughter. You've been terribly depressed, just as Rachel was. 'Moping about,' as Cosette calls it. Poor Laura. Rachel's death was such a shock and you haven't recovered from it. You see her ghost. You can't bring yourself to go through her things. You brood. Your lover has deserted you. It's all more than you can bear."

"No . . . no. . . ."

"But there's an end to that. A solution to your unhappiness." He took my hands and brought me to my feet.

"What are you going to do?" The pulse was beating loudly in my ears.

"It won't hurt, Laura. I promise you that. It will be over so quickly. You won't know a thing." His eyes were burning with a strange fever.

My lips were numb, I couldn't speak.

"Come along," he said, taking my arm. I tried to wrench myself free, but his hold was like iron. "If you resist it will only make it worse," he said.

We went through the connecting door to my mother's room. He found the light. The boxes I had packed the day I



found the letter were still there, the suede jacket thrown carelessly across a chair.

"Sit down here, Laura," he said, leading me to the dressing table. He pushed me gently down on the brocaded stool. "Like mother, like daughter," he repeated.

From a left hand drawer he took out a pistol. It was small and black with a pearl handle. It looked like a toy. "I bought this for Rachel after the break-in last summer. That break-in—a couple of kids, no doubt—was a lucky thing in a way. It gave me an excuse to get the dogs. I didn't want strangers popping in unannounced. The gun, I thought, I might have to use for other emergencies."

I stared at the gun. I was the emergency. "Phillipe, you're out of your mind. You can't . . . you can't. . . ." It wasn't happening. Nothing of this was happening.

"I won't do anything," said Phillipe. "*You*. You will commit suicide."

"They . . . the police. Two suicides will look strange to them," I argued, grasping at straws.

He thought for a moment. "Yes, that's true. You have a point there."

"Please let me go, Phillipe. I promise I won't say a word. . . ."

He shook his head. "That's no good. That kind of promise, made in the heat of the moment, is never kept." He ran his hand through his hair. "You'll leave—that's it! You decided to go to the airport and wait for a space on a plane to Paris. And that's the last we've seen or heard of you."

"And when I don't arrive? I have friends there, you know. They'll begin asking questions." It was a bluff. I did have friends, true, and one or two of them would probably write here to Storm House, but on receiving no reply, they would merely shrug and go on with their daily lives, forgetting me. After a month or two, the concierge would pack all my belongings and rent the apartment to someone else. Nobody would know, nobody would care. Not even Armand. He had left the Island without a word to me, without as much as a



casual goodbye. Phillipe would kill and bury me somewhere on the island. I would lie there beneath the lichen covered rocks, the rain beating upon me, the snow covering me in winter.

"It seems then," Phillipe was saying, "that we have two alternatives, both risky."

"The smartest thing would be to let me go," I argued. It was mad, ludicrous, this dialogue, this debate about my own death. All the while Phillipe standing there with that toy gun in his hand.

"That I can't do. That would be the greatest risk of all." He opened the drawer of the dressing table and took a sheet of note paper from it and a pen. "I have decided on suicide after all. You have plenty of motive. You are unstable. Kyle, Shirley and Cosette could all testify honestly to that. . . ."

"No, you're wrong. Cosette will know. She will suspect."

"If she does, she will never say a word. I know Cosette. She would cut off her arm before she spoke against me." He put the pen in my hand. "You needn't look at me that way. I'll tell you what to write."

I let the pen fall through my fingers. "You are so good at writing this kind of note. Why don't you do it yourself?"

"I'd rather not chance it. Rachel's writing I knew very well. Not yours. Besides it isn't necessary. Rachel was already dead. You aren't." He took my fingers and closed them around the pen. "Be a good girl," he coaxed. "We'll make it short. Let's see . . . say, 'I'm tired, tired and miserable. I don't seem able to cope. . . .'" He paused. "Well, why aren't you writing?" His voice turned sharp.

"I can't. I won't." I still couldn't believe that any of this was real.

He put the gun to my temple. It felt cold and hard, pressing the bone, the bone that Phillipe could very well shatter into a thousand bloody fragments. "Write!" he commanded. It was real.

I had sometimes wondered how people could be forced to comply meekly with their would-be murderers. If certain

death were facing them, why should they obey? Now I knew. It gave them time, a handful of moments, postponement of the final inevitability, a drowning man still struggling for a last gasp of air, a man strapped to the electric chair, hoping for a last reprieve.

Phillipe dictated, "I am tired, very miserable." I wrote. "It would be good to lay my head down and rest . . ." Phillipe drummed his fingers on the dressing table. "... Rachel came again last night . . . I am going to her. . . ." He walked away from me. "Let's see. . . ." I watched him in the mirror as he paced back and forth, the gun in his hand, his head lowered, thinking. In a quick, sudden flash it came to me that he would never dare shoot from a distance. In order to make it look like suicide he would have to put the bullet through me at close range.

"I can't go on. . . ."

I wrote, one eye on his image, every muscle in my body tightly coiled. When he reached a point farthest from me, I sprang to my feet and made a dash for the door.

He caught me before I could open it, twisting my arm behind my back. "We'll have none of that," he said.

I struggled, fighting him with all my strength, but he was behind me, and my arm was bent at an awkward angle. The sharp, searing pain shot through me like hot needles. I screamed. His knee kicked at my legs. "Go on, go on," he mumbled through clenched teeth. He pushed me back to the dressing table, to the little brocaded stool, and forcing me down on it, bent my head forward. My hair was hanging over my eyes, but I could see the gun, coming up and up and up.

There was a roaring in my ears, the clamor of my heart, the drumming of my blood. And then a merciful darkness shut down, erasing it all.

## CHAPTER XIX

The lamp was on, the book I had been reading face down beside it. The curtains were drawn and through the gaps in the sides I saw that it was still night. I pushed myself upon one elbow and with dull, dazed eyes looked around my bedroom. I was alone, lying on top of the covers, wearing my robe and nightgown. The clock ticked away. Four-thirty. Four-thirty and five seconds. My mouth felt as if it had been stuffed with dry cotton. I ran my tongue along my lips. I had had a dream, a horrible nightmare. Phillipe had been printing money in the cellar and had tried to kill me with a toy pistol.

My left arm was painfully stiff. I slipped out of my robe and saw the bruise, a torn purple half moon well above the elbow. The mark of fingers.

The terror returned then, flaring up in my cheeks with a hot rush of blood. It had not been a dream. It had all been real. Where was he? Why hadn't he finished, pulled the trigger and killed me? Or perhaps he had. My terror grew. Perhaps my real body was lying on the floor of my mother's room, the head all bloodied, the dead, rigid fingers still grasping the gun. What was here now was my ghost. I had joined Mignon and Rachel. My feeling of a preordained fate had been correct. I would never leave Storm House.

I looked down at my arm again. Not a ghost's arm, but mine, the bruise a vivid mark on the white skin. The sound



of approaching footsteps brought my head up. I watched, horrified, as the door knob began to turn silently, slowly. Phillipe! Phillipe had come back to finish what he had begun. I pushed the blankets back. I must run. I must hide.

Too late, the door opened.

It was Armand. "You all right now?" He had a snifter of brandy in his hand.

I stared at him open mouthed, my confused brain spinning. Black dots danced before my eyes. Armand's face, the room seemed to be slipping away.

"Here—not again." Armand's arm was around my shoulders, the glass touched my lips. "Drink," he commanded. I took a sip and then another. The stuff burned my throat, fanning out in hot fire across my chest.

"Okay?" Armand's eyes were anxious.

I nodded. "Yes."

I heard him plump up the pillows behind me. "Lie back," he said.

I sank back and closed my eyes. When I opened them I saw that Armand was smiling at me. I had forgotten how beautiful his smile could be. "That was a close one," he said.

"I . . . I . . ."

"You fainted," he said. "Just before I clouted Phillipe over the head."

"I fainted . . ." I repeated. Yes, that much was clear. "But how . . . how . . . ? Phillipe said you had gone."

"I just made it look like I had."

"I . . . I thought you might still be here."

"Did you?"

I averted my eyes. I could not look at him, remembering how I had gone to the cottage in the Cove convinced that Armand had killed my mother, hoping he had not. "Yes." There was a long silence. I began to pluck at the coverlet, still not meeting his eyes.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said quickly.

"That's not true. You've got a million questions burning in your brain. Out with it."

"What good would it do? You would never answer them anyway."

"Try me." He was still smiling.

"I . . . there was part of a letter I found. My mother had written it to me before she died. Your name was there—and Phillipe's too. She had discovered something and she was going to the police. At first I thought it was you. . . ." My voice trailed off.

"And what did you do about it?"

"I gave the letter to Phillipe. He said he would take it to the police, but he didn't, you see. . . ."

"It's just as well he didn't. It would have fouled things up for me."

We stared at one another. "But Phillipe said . . . he told me he killed Rachel. . . . Armand . . . he . . . he's a forger . . . he's got this printing press in the cellar. Whatever you've done couldn't be as bad. Armand, it couldn't. . . ."

"You haven't much faith in me, have you?" he asked.

"How could I? You wouldn't let me." I bit my lip to keep it from trembling.

He brushed a lock of hair from my forehead. "I shouldn't be teasing you now, Laura, not after what you've been through. Do you want to hear the whole story?"

"Yes," I said eagerly, grasping his hand.

"I'm not a criminal. No. In fact, I'm on the other side. I'm working for the Treasury Department. Secret Service."

I looked at his long hair, the torn jeans, the old jersey sweater. He must have seen the disbelief in my eyes. "I've been working for them since I got out of special school at Michigan State," he said. "My field is forgery."

"Then you knew about Phillipe?"

"Well, not exactly. Some six months ago we began receiving complaints of bogus five and ten dollar bills that were being passed in Daveport, Portland, Boston, some in New

York, bills which were identical and very skillfully done."

"Yes . . ." I interrupted. "Phillipe bragged about that."

He gave me a rueful, half smile. "Phillipe—that's where I made my biggest mistake. I couldn't picture Phillipe bold enough to try such a stunt. You see, I thought all along it was Kyle Brennan."

"Kyle?"

"He passed a ten dollar bill at a gas station outside Portland. The attendant there took special note of Kyle. For one, he had this gorgeous brunette in the front seat. And for another, Kyle, when he gave him the bill, told him to keep the change. When the attendant put the bill in the money box he noticed it was slightly different from the others. He was a bright, young man, and by this time a suspicious one, so he immediately wrote down the license number of the car. Then he called us, giving a full description of Kyle. You can imagine how *that* hit me. Kyle Brennan!" He smiled and shook his head. "Ordinarily the man who knowingly passes a phony bill is pretty well removed from the king pin—the manufacturer. The usual procedure would have been to arrest him, get what information we could and try to follow the ladder up. But when we ran a check on Kyle we found that he had done a short term in prison some eighteen years earlier on a forgery charge and that he had once worked as an apprentice to an engraver. We had a hunch that he was making his own money and we decided that if we could discover the press we'd really have ourselves a case."

"Is that what you were looking for the night I found you chipping away at the wall?"

"Yes. And lucky for me that you did. I would have had a hard time explaining to Kyle what I was doing there. Might have blown the whole thing."

"Why didn't you tell me?" I asked. "It would have been so much easier, if you had told me."

"I couldn't. It was too dangerous. I wanted you to leave Storm House. People who are outside the law can get pretty desperate at times."



"Yes . . ." I shuddered. "Phillipe certainly was."

"Phillipe," he repeated. "I'll always blame myself for not connecting him with this operation. I had always believed that he was such a weak sister, following Rachel. That law and order bit. And Kyle was slick enough to get by with printing money right under his nose."

"And you never suspected that Phillipe might have killed Rachel?"

"No. There wasn't any reason for me to."

"He killed Marlyn, too."

"I had a hunch that Marlyn's death wasn't accidental, that she might have known too much. But, again, it was Kyle I suspected, not Phillipe."

"And you didn't go into the police station with me that day. . . ."

"They knew me. I worked on a case once with them."

He reached over and took a sip of brandy. "What I can't understand," I said, ". . . is why, if you wanted to stay on the Island, you got into that big fight with Phillipe."

"I was acting in character. Cantankerous, obstinate Armand. I deliberately provoked that quarrel. Nothing was happening. The boss was pushing me. . . ."

"Your friend, Eliot?" I exclaimed.

"How'd you figure that out?"

"I . . . I . . ." I couldn't bring myself to tell him that I had cavedropped. "I . . . sort of guessed."

"Eliot was sent over to check on me. I had been here too long. Kyle was beginning to look at me in a funny way. I was supposed to be down at the Cove, but he kept bumping into me up at the house. So I decided to provoke a fight with Phillipe. I never did use that damn car of his except that once when you and I went to look for Marlyn."

"You never left, though."

"I got over to the mainland and took the Boston bus, making sure someone saw me. It happened to be Clem. He was on the bus, too. He got off at Blue Hill and I rode to the next stop. Then I doubled back. I've been here in the house



all along. I finally found the press—it was hidden behind a panel in one of the dungeons. Then I waited until I could catch Kyle at it. Tonight when I saw Kyle and Shirley and Phillipe—that was the big shocker—go down to the cellar and heard the press start up, I sneaked out to the dock and signaled my men over on Boone Island. They had been waiting there for nearly a month. When they came we went straight to the cellar. It never entered my head that you had discovered the press until Cosette told me. If I had been a half minute later. . . .”

I took his hands and held them tightly. “Thank God you weren’t.”

“Amen,” he said.

It wasn’t the end though. I left Storm House and moved into a motel in Daveport since my testimony was needed for the trial. There I learned from Armand that Phillipe had taken violently ill after his incarceration. He lay in a coma for three days and, without regaining consciousness, died. An autopsy revealed that his death was due to chronic mercuric poisoning. His ulcerous condition, the coroner claimed, had made him highly susceptible to some chemical compound he had used in the photographic processing of his plates. Recalling Phillipe’s complaint of stomach pains, the tremor in his hand, the facial tic, I realized that he had been a very ill man. But I did not think his death was at all accidental. I was sure that he had been slowly, deliberately poisoned, and I thought I knew why and by whom.

“There is a justice,” Cosette had told me that day in the kitchen. Honor might have forbidden her to inform upon Phillipe, but she could see that he paid for his crimes. “The murderer won’t go free,” she had assured me.

I never spoke of my feelings to Cosette, or to anyone. I kept my secret. How could I prove that Cosette had taken justice into her own hands? Or so I rationalized. For I could no more point a finger at this woman who had suffered so much than I could at myself.

I saw much of Armand during those days, and now that he no longer was forced to keep his identity, his past from me, we became closer and more open with each other. One sunny Sunday afternoon we were sitting in the park watching a group of boys playing kickball. Armand, his arm carelessly thrown about my shoulders, suddenly looked down at me and smiled, for no apparent reason. Taking advantage of his good mood, I said, "You've forgiven me, haven't you?"

"Forgiven you?" he asked in surprise. "Ah—yes. That. The letter you never answered. Dropping me the way you did."

"Then you have?"

He bent his head and kissed me lightly on the mouth. "Not entirely. I don't have a forgiving nature. Remember? I'm a jackass. Pretty stubborn." He drew me closer to him. "But . . ." he said with an exaggerated sigh, "even a stubborn jackass mellows with time."

And looking into those smiling, half mocking eyes I had the strong feeling that this peculiar, recalcitrant, dark-headed man I loved so much had already mellowed, and that the "time" he spoke of so airily had, despite himself, already come.



### About the author:

Florence Hurd was born in Chicago and was graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in political science. Her career has included stints as a wrapper in a department store, salesgirl, welfare worker, housewife, Gallup pollster, mother and confession writer, not necessarily in that order. She wrote her first Gothic novel in 1965 and has been writing them ever since.

Ms. Hurd now lives in Cardiff-by-the-Sea, a small beach town north of San Diego.